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"Electrical Experts" Earn $12 to $30 a Day

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Trained "Electrical Experts" are in great demand at the highest salaries, and the opportunities for advancement and a big success in this line are the greatest ever known.

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Today even the ordinary Electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary Electricians—to boss Big Jobs—the jobs that pay.

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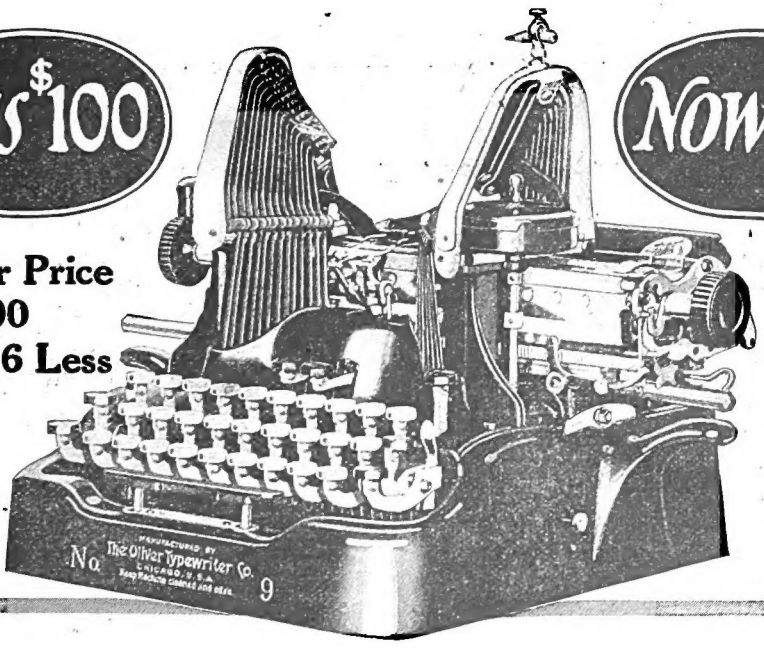

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ADVENTURE
March 18th, 1921

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Volume 28
Number 6

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How In One Evening I Learned The Secret of Drawing

By Walter Sayden

The Most Fascinating Business in the World

FROM boyhood, I have always wanted to draw things. I suppose there are hundreds of young fellows who feel the same way as I did. I often said that if it were possible, I should choose commercial art as a profession. It was not only the big salaries and independence enjoyed by artists and cartoonists that appealed to me, it was the fascination of the game itself.

He was drawing little pictures

But I could hardly draw a straight line. My friends used to have laughing hysterics at my attempts to sketch things.

One morning, as I was coming into town on the eight o'clock train, I met Larry Stafford. I had come into town with him every day for years, usually passing the time discussing the morning papers.

But this particular morning he had a pad and pencil in his hand. He was drawing little pictures of things that looked like a series of small animals.

"What on earth are you doing?" I asked in amazement.

Larry smiled. "Don't be afraid, I am quite sane. These little pictures are part of a scheme of mine. I am illustrating an idea. They are supposed to be a graphic representation of a deal I am putting over. They speak louder than words."

I watched him—amazed to see that he drew very well indeed. As he proceeded, and the drawings became more life-like, my curiosity was aroused—I asked him about it.

"Why, I am surprised that you ask me!" he answered. "Look how easy it all is,"—and he quickly sketched a few other figures and grinned at my amazement.

"There is just one little secret of the whole thing, Walter," he added. "I never drew before in my life, and you see,—these little sketches really are not bad, are they? You have always wanted to draw, and even if you don't become an artist, you will find it a mighty convenient thing to know. This secret makes drawing as easy as writing. Let's get together this evening and I'll show you how simple it is. I'll give you a little lesson."

The Greatest Surprise of My Life

That night I was astonished to learn that there was but One Great Rule that covered every sort of drawing. I mastered this rule in just fifty minutes, and in two hours found that I could draw. Think of it! It was almost like magic. I had never before been able to draw a recognizable object.

At this time I was a salesman, so that the only time that I had to practise and apply this secret, this Rule, was in spare minutes when at the office or at home. But I progressed with almost unbelievable rapidity.

My First Real Drawing

One day I was talking with a buyer. Remembering Larry's "idea-pictures," I drew some figures to illustrate the point I was trying to establish. He looked at the pictures and caught my idea at once. Before I left he gave me a larger order than I had ever before received from him. My *pictures* had put my idea over.

This worked so well, that I tried it again—

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veral times, in fact—and each time I got the me results. My pictures seemed to make a ronger appeal than my words, and my sales creased tremendously.

But that was not all. Two weeks later, I verheard a conversation that struck me as nusing. I wrote it down, illustrated it and, st for fun, sent it to one of the humorous eeklies. A few days later, to my great sur-ise and pleasure, I received a check from the t editor and a request for more contributions.

From that time on, I sent in little sketches id jokes, more or less regularly. A few onths ago, I received an offer which startled e. The magazine for which I had been awing wished to take me on the gular staff at a much greater lary than I was then making.

My love of drawing came rongly to the front and, needless say, I accepted at once, and the st thing I did was to tell Larry afford, what his idea had led to. Then he heard that I was actually successful artist on a real maga-ne he gasped with amazement.

I told him how the same One eat Rule of drawing which had ade it easy for him to draw had eant even more to me—and how is simple home-study course of the famous tist, Charles Lederer, which we had gone er that evening had given me the secret hich had meant so much.

Larry laughed at my enthusiasm, but ad-tted that such a remarkable success as mine, as enough to make a man a bit optimistic.

Easier than Learning to Operate a Typewriter

Through this amazing system, drawing can *taught* as easily as anything else. In his mple home-study course this world-famous rtoonist, Charles Lederer, teaches you to aw just as a business school teaches you to ep books, or operate a typewriter or write orthand. But it is a hundred times simpler an any of those accomplishments.

And the best part of it all is, that the course aches you to draw so that you can *sell* your ctures right from the start. That is really e most important part after all. Everyone ants to sell his work, and that is just what ou can do, with Mr. Lederer's great secret.

Don't misunderstand, I am not praising my-lf. The point is this,—if I, who never was able to draw at all, could achieve this really remarkable success, others can do the same, or better.

See for yourself,—send for the course and try it out. If you can draw at all you will probably get along even faster than I, and you will find modern commercial art the most fascinating and delightful work imaginable. Remember, that opportunities in this uncrowded field are unlimited. There is a constantly growing demand for cartoonists and illustrators. If you like to draw, or if you *think* that you *would* like to draw, don't miss this wonderful opportunity to learn in an evening or two of your spare time.

Mr. Charles Lederer, the well-known newspaper cartoonist, after years of practical working experience, has developed one great simple rule for success in all branches of commercial art. This amazing secret has revolutionized the entire theory of drawing. It means that drawing can be easy for *you* as writing. Out of his many years of work-a-day experience, Mr. Lederer offers This One Big Secret of Drawing to all.

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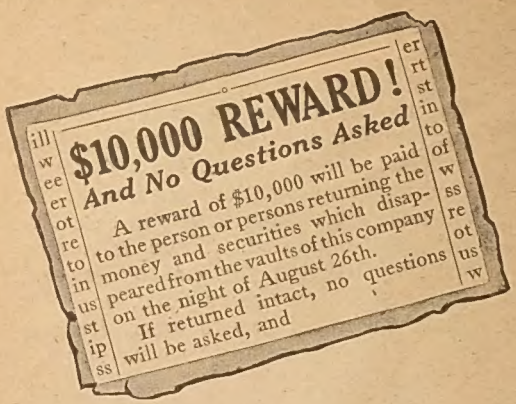
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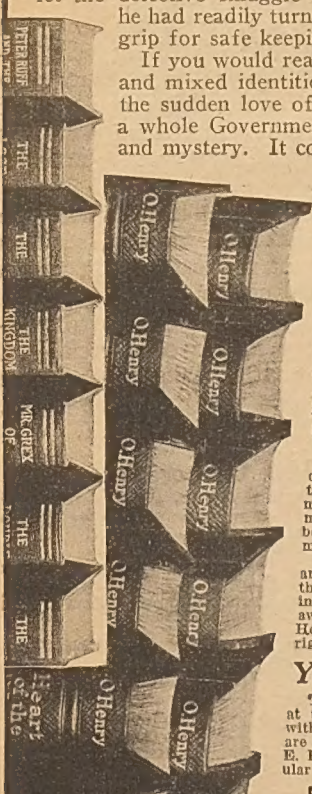

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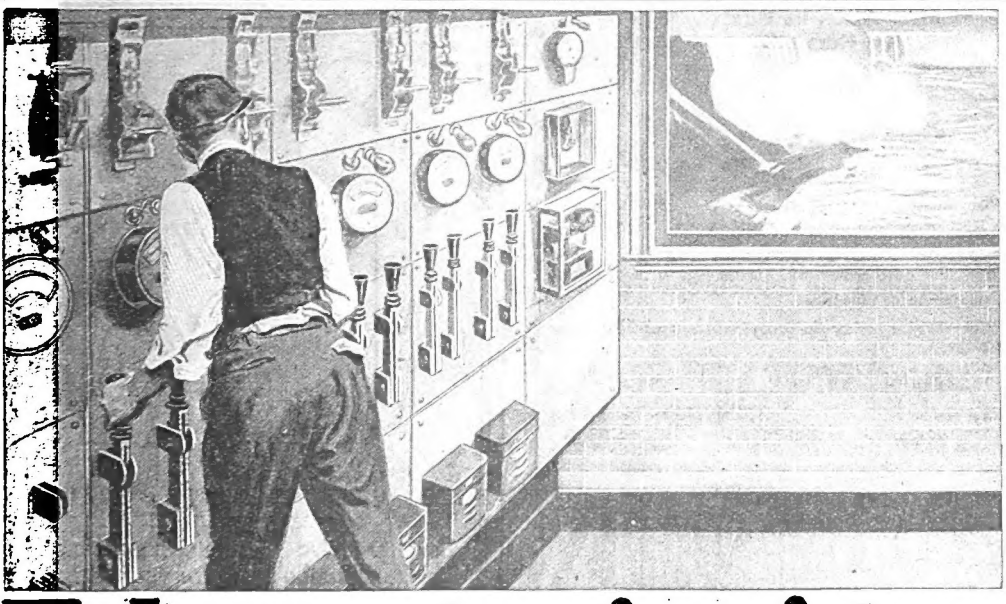

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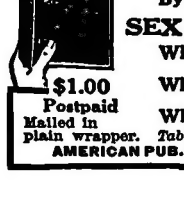

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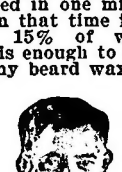

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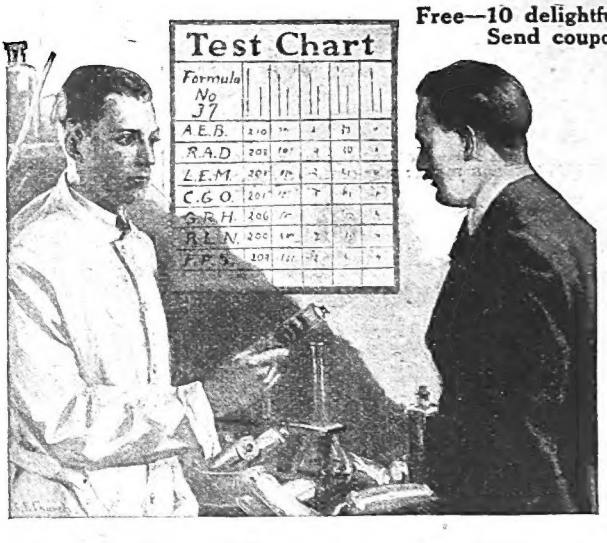

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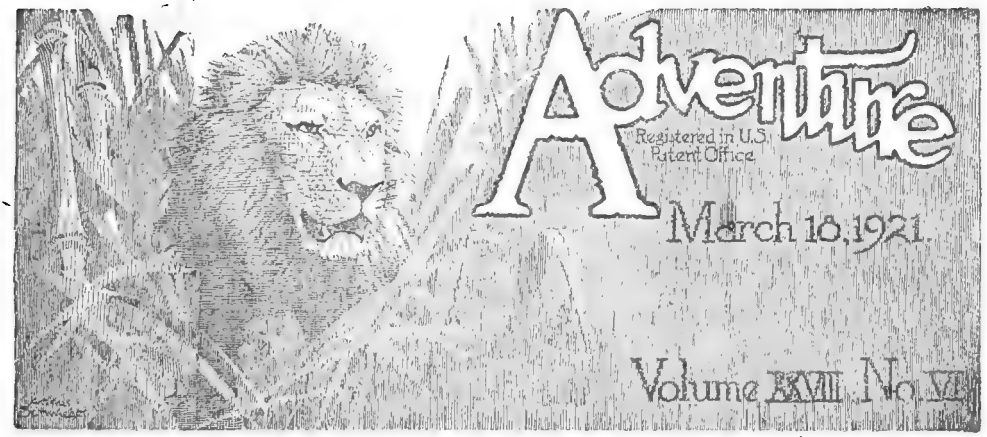

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WHEN sheepmen and cow-herders fought for the range and bands of roving men took the law into their own hands. "THE MAN FROM PONDERA," by Robert J. Horton. A complete novelette in the next issue.

A RATTLESNAKE led the old prospector to desert-gold, and the fangs of three human rattlesnakes struck. "THE JUDGMENT OF THE DESERT," a complete novelette by E. E. Harriman, in the next issue.

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Adventure
Mid-March Number 1921
Vol. XXVIII No. VI

Author of "The Swinging Mirrors," "The Crimson Chamber," etc.

I

"LOOSEN up above your hips and set close. Don't let your hoss boost ye—give. Give to every move he makes. Keep your pants glued to the saddle—like this."

"Uncle U" rode ahead to show how to sit a trot. Lean, strong shoulders well back, his whiskered profile a model for our traditional Uncle Sam, he was a figure of careless mastery, a type of the best that New England had given to the West.

Young Wheeler on another pinto cowpony, and in his new cowboy outfit, did his best to imitate his teacher, and did well.

He was startled when the older man pulled up across his path.

"Son, are ye sure y' want to go on to the Border with us, now Buck is goin' back?" he asked abruptly.

"I am going on," was the quick answer, and the young man's green eyes narrowed. "I haven't changed my mind."

"All right—" pivoting his mount to go on— "come on, let's scamper."

Against the purple sunset haze at their backs they raised a cloud of fine, hot dust in their scurry across an arm of the Texas desert. The parched trail soon brought them to a scrub growth of cottonwoods.

In its shade the older man again drew rein and faced about.

" 'Fore we get back to camp I got to tell ye two things. One is: You wa'n't born to ride a hoss, but you do well enough—well's most of 'em. The other is: you *are* a born wizard with a six-gun.

"You were good enough at straight shootin' to begin with, and I've taught ye all the tricks I know; the rest is practise—and nerve. No use me wastin' any more time, or you either, givin' you lessons in jugglin' a Colt .45."

The delicate-featured young face, almost girlish in its lines and texture, hardened about the lips.

"What I want to know," Dan said gently, "is, how do I stack up with these Western gun-throwers—the best of them?"

"That depends, son, on how you act in front of another gun. If you can draw and shoot as ye do in practise—anywhere nigh as well—when the other man is reachin' for his irons, there ain't more than two gun-throwers in the country that can down ye."

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The young man's eyes darkened from amber-green to almost black as he looked into the distance.

"Who are the two best?"

"One of 'em you ain't likely to meet," said Uncle U. "'Ghost' Garth is still up North in the minin' country. But Cinch Masters I'm expectin' here any time now. I wrote him—he's been ridin' shotgun for Wells-Fargo over on the Canadian—and that's one thing we been waitin' for. I need men like him on this trip—a couple of 'em."

"To punch cattle?" with a quick look from the odd-colored eyes.

"I told ye all along, jest 's I told all the boys, there was more to it than that." Uncle U met the look squarely. "I need men that won't scare or back down from man, devil, or Injuns. And I'm payin' well for a short season. I want Cinch Masters, and one more if I can get him."

When it became evident that Uncle U was not going to add to his speech Dan asked—

"What about a man named Parsons—'Dude' Parsons?"

"'Nough. Why?" Uncle U retorted shortly. "He anywhere around Gopher?"

"I heard he'd be in town tonight—at the Hoffman House bar. If he is, shall I tell him you want to see him?"

"No. Better let him be!" Uncle U was decisive. "Wait until he's had his whirl and sobered up. And jest as well not to stir him up. When he's drinkin' he's like a stick o' dynamite—safe enough if you let him be.

"That reminds me—one more thing I had to tell ye. Buck Brant is startin' for Chicago tonight and I'm goin' along—me and King—to see him off on the train at Fort Worth. We'll be gone two days and I'm goin' to leave you to boss the outfit."

At the final statement Uncle U slowed up and spoke distinctly, watching for the effect. Young Dan sat his horse very still; but under its new tan his thin skin flushed richly.

"The outfit is not going to love that—a tenderfoot bossing them," he stated. "And a hired man at that."

"Oh, well—you can give me a dollar, and I'll tell 'em you bought a share in the ranch."

As he spoke the two horses again walked on abreast.

"If you hadn't lost your roll in Austin I'd be tickled to sell ye a sure-enough share. Took all my ready money to buy Buck out, and I need about fifteen hundred cash—need it so bad I'd sell an eighth interest includin' the Stone House for that figure."

"Do you mean that?" asked Dan quickly. "It's worth ten times that——"

"I know all that," Uncle broke in. "But I tell ye I need the ready cash—and I want somebody along that has an interest. I'd write ye a witnessed transfer as soon as we get back—but no use talkin' about it."

"Yes, there is," Dan caught him up sharply. "I won back all that and a little more at poker. It is right here—" producing a neat parcel from inside his jacket—"and I'm ready to do business if you are. In that bundle is fifteen, even."

"You made a trade," said Uncle U. "Gimme the money now—better not flourish it in camp or in town—and I'll make out the writtin' before I leave for the Fort. You own an eighth interest in the ranch and what's on it. I want to tell ye right now, you have made a big bargain."

With his usual quiet repression Wheeler showed no elation or excitement over his purchase. He did not know how much he had bought, but he was relieved to get rid of the money, which he had put aside with the vague intention of investing it at the first chance, in something that offered a prospect of risk and big returns.

He had taken a sudden liking for the eccentric old man, moreover, and knew that Uncle U's word was never broken.

He had heard Uncle U tell his newly hired cow-punchers that they were engaged for an adventure that might mean a fight with Indians, Mexican bandits, or both. That must mean that the enterprise offered unusual reward as well as unusual danger, and he was satisfied with that. But Uncle U proceeded to give him more definite facts.

"Tell ye right now, son, we are after more than the proceeds of cattle-raisin', and if we get back with any luck and a whole skin, you'll have a roll that'll last ye for a spell. Better keep a close mouth, though. Tell ye more when I got the time."

And he shook his mount into a canter as the sudden dusk deepened.

GOPHER was a mushroom town, a day's journey from the then end of the transcontinental railroad which would soon reach and pass it. Its reason for existence was that it lay at the forks

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of two great wagon-trails; one going on across Texas toward the sunset, the other leading north through the mountains.

Over both these trails passed caravans of horsemen and hooded wagons, and the shifting population of the camp-city was incredibly varied and vivid.

It was a wild and hectic community even for that region and for those days when—to quote a more able chronicler—"Apaches raided, claim-jumpers fought, road-agents held up stages, bad-men shot one another in the streets and life was stepping to a lively tune."

Nowhere and at no time was the tune more jazzy than at this cross-roads camp at this very time. Nowhere were bad-men more plentiful. Chased down from regions farther north by the advance of law and order, they infested the sandy streets of board-shacks and tents, "armed and silent, each one deadlier than a bull rattlesnake."

Here, camped on the outskirts of this nomad community, Uncle U had waited to pick the men he wanted to take with him to his ranch, the Lazy-X, on the border.

And it was in this more than lawless place that young Dan Wheeler was to be left to handle the new outfit, which consisted at present of four cowboys and the cook, all with restless notions and nothing to do.

They were men, moreover, who had been chosen for their records of reckless nerve and because they were willing to take a dangerous trip with an unknown purpose. It was not a pleasant prospect.

As he rode toward camp in the deepening dusk with Uncle U, Dan was thinking of the two days ahead of him. He wanted to ask advice as to the managing of turbulent cow-punchers and he didn't know how to do it.

"Owner or no owner, they are not going to like it," he remarked presently. "And probably the cook will quit."

"Let him," said Uncle U briefly. "He ain't much of a cook anyway. Get another. The boys 'll be good, I guess. Don't ride 'em with too tight a rein, and don't shoot any of 'em unless they get awful raw. I had trouble enough to git men with grit enough to stick—men that ain't scared by talk of bandits, Injuns or spooks—and I need 'em all and two more besides. Dude Parsons is jest the right kind if he'll come, but he's a heavy swell and mighty notional."

This made about the tenth time Uncle U had mentioned spooks. It must be more than a figure of speech, Dan reflected, and he was about to ask just what was meant by it when his attention was distracted.

They were near town where the trail was lined by temporary camps, and at the moment they rode past a newly arrived party who were pitching tents on the edge of the cottonwoods. At the sight Uncle U had drawn rein and come to a standstill, then spurred on abruptly. As Dan overtook him the older man rode close to ask—

"Notice the feller hopplin' the horses—bow-legged, mean-lookin' skunk?"

"Yes, and he noticed you—put his hand on his gun."

"Good reason—I got to kill him some time, I shouldn't wonder. His name's Upson. Don't forget it!"

After a short silence Dan said—

"That's the first time I ever heard you say anything like that."

"May be the last," said Uncle U gravely. "Now I *know* they're after us. Better keep a guard posted all night while I'm gone, and I'll git back 's quick 's I can. The sooner we git started the better."

Never had Dan heard the old gentleman speak with such firm determination. His lined face was like granite, and Dan recalled the stories of his many gun-duels.

In a score of shooting affrays, it was said, he had killed only one man, preferring to wing his opponent in the gun-hand, in the arm, or in both. He was accounted the only gunman with the skill and the nerve to attempt such tactics; but it was his claim that "it saved time and funeral-expenses—made a neater job, too."

When Uncle U felt it necessary to kill a man the need must be great indeed.

The camp of the Lazy-X outfit was in sight now, a quarter-mile nearer the center of town in a smaller bunch of trees. As Uncle U and Dan rode into camp supper was ready and the men were waiting around the small fire; for the night chill came almost on the instant after sunset.

"What ho! A welcome sight, by my halidome!" called out King, the foreman.

Ruddy and big of frame and voice, ever talking and cheerful, he came to take Uncle U's horse.

"The boys were gettin' so danged hungry and cannibal-eyed I got shivers all up the fat back of me, by Henry. Say—" he lowered his voice as he took the bridle—

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"Upson's come in from the north, with two Injuns in the outfit—Cheyennes."

"I saw him," Uncle U answered hurriedly. "Sooner we start for Fort Worth the sooner we get back. Where's Buck?"

"Started already—waiting for us in town. He left good-by for Mr. Wheeler," King said as he led away the horses.

Dan was annoyed to feel that he flushed, but he couldn't help it. The "Mr." meant that he did not yet belong to the rough fellowship of the West. His first reason for coming on this expedition was that he wanted to learn to be a real master-artist with a Colt—to make sure he could take care of himself in this land of bad-men and gun-throwers.

While they were at supper about the fire, Uncle U made a short farewell speech.

"Boys, King and I are going to see young Brant off, and Dan Wheeler is boss while we're gone. He thinks you won't like being bossed by a tenderfoot; but he's bought a share in the ranch and paid cash for it, so he might as well get broken in to giving orders. Don't all go in town at once tonight. I want two or three men in camp all the time, because there's an outfit just pulled in that I don't like the looks of. If you got any remarks to make, spit 'em out."

When he gave orders Uncle U spoke with sharp precision, and he was always obeyed—or things happened. The cow-punchers grinned a bit between bites; but the cook grunted as he sat down with his plate and cup.

"Motion carried," said King good-naturedly. "And if you don't go in town, you won't get into trouble."

Although he looked cheerfully satisfied, the foreman warned Dan in an aside just before mounting for the start.

"That cook asked for money and Uncle paid him up to date—and he's cross-eyed besides. If he quits, be sure to get another—a good one—or ——'s out for noon. You got to feed 'em. Good luck!"

Dan had followed a little way to say good-by and when he came back to the camp he found that only one man had started to spend the evening in town—a sullen chap named Chance. The other three cowboys volunteered to stay in camp.

"We're all dead broke anyhow—not the price of a drink between us—and the cook has quit cold," one of them said disgustedly. "He was as yellow as his biscuits anyway. If you want to go in town to dig up another cook we'll watch camp all right."

"Thanks, I'll do it," said Dan. "I'll get a cook, too."

And when he had ridden off townward the cowboy told his fellows:

"That lad has a kind of lady-like face and uses a white handkerchief, but somehow I got a notion he'd be real unpleasant if he once got peevish. Ever get a square look into those eyes of his? Make me think of a tiger I saw in a circus once."

II

"I'm a ramblin' wreck of pov-ver-tee
And a son-of-a-gun for beer!"

caroled Dude Parsons, and he waltzed gravely in the space between the card-tables and the bar to the accompaniment of harsh music that came from the dance-hall in the rear.

In the Hoffman House bar of Gopher his audience of sifted bad-men looked on respectfully, even with an occasional half-smile of grim amusement. For his nickname "Dude" had been given him as an honor, in that it meant that he went at all times appareled in the last cry of the style of Cattledom, even to spurs and hat-cord wrought with gold.

Figuratively, too, it was common knowledge that his 'scutcheon was brightly spotless, his trusty Colt entitled to a goodly company of honorable notches. With his late arrival, in fact, had come tidings of a recent enterprise to the northward in which he had not only broken a faro-bank, but had wiped out the unlamented dealer, a notoriously deadly gunman and operator of a brace-game.

Therefore Dude Parsons was unbuckling and disporting himself; between times he called all hands to the bar. And he danced, as he did all other things, with earnestness and finish. His rather prominent blue eyes with an eager appeal in their candid depths were fixed on his neatly shod feet as they deftly rapped the boards. He waved aloft his graceful and capable hands as with a final kick and twirl he finished his breakdown.

"Gentle-men, once more you drink with me!" he announced, and his rich voice filled the room. Turning on the furtive, weak-eyed assistant-bartender he roared:

"You—Gun-Shy!" and Gun-Shy jumped.

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"Set 'em up—set 'em up, and show speed! Every gent name his choice—call for what he pleases—he'll get plain liquor anyway. Ca-are-ful now, Gun-Shy. It's bad luck to break glass—but step lively, man. Life's short and you know yours will be shorter if you annoy me. Why, I'm liable to act up nasty 'most any minute. I'm thirsty and I'm peevish, but I'd hate to— Hello-hello-hello! Who-o-om have we *here?*"

For his intent absorbent look, so keen to penetrate the thoughts of men, had met a pair of long-slit, greenish eyes that had given him a jolt—as they always did to a man of perception or sympathetic insight. He had come suddenly face to face with Dan Wheeler.

For a moment Parsons stood staring at the stranger, who was plainly quite new to the cowboy clothes that he wore, as if uncertain how to take him. Suddenly he shook his curly head as if to shake off a fly.

"Well, Reginald," he said slowly, "what will you drink?"

Though he flushed richly according to his uncomfortable custom, Dan did not drop his long-slit, amber eyes as he said softly—

"Lemonade, please."

Silence.

For a flash Parsons doubted whether he was being made fun of. All the men stopped on their way to the bar to stare at the youth with the handsome, almost girlish face. The dance-music had stopped, and curious listening faces filled the doorway at the rear. A space was formed in which Dan stood motionless.

Parsons' wide appealing eyes roamed round the circle of faces.

"Will some kind person tell me," he asked in a low, abused tone, "did I hear somebody—or something—or— You, Gun-Shy—" with a sudden pounce— "D'you hear a still, small voice say 'Lemonade?'"

"S-s-sure." Gun-Shy jumped and stammered, "He s-s-sus— He s-s-s——"

"S-s-stop it!" shrilled Parsons. "Now you got me doing it. You sound like a leaky keg of beer; but you heard it. I didn't know but I was seeing things. But there it stands, gentlemen, all diked up like a little red wagon, and it 'lows as how it will take 'lemonade.' Oh-h-h *sugar!* Now listen to me, Clarence. You—drink—liquor. Get that? Plain liquor—and you do it right now while we wait!"

As he finished his hand rested carelessly on the handle of his Colt, his lithe body was poised and set like a panther's. The bystanders unostentatiously got out of line.

The stranger, however, made no move toward the gun in its new holster at his hip. Instead he slowly folded his arms in a Napoleonesque pose as he remonstrated in his slightly hoarse voice with a timbre curiously moving—

"But—I don't *want* to!"

Was there a suspicion of a smile about the delicately curved lips?

The uncertainty made Parsons lose his even balance for the moment.

"Don't want to—you don't want— Say, Percy, you listen to me. Swallow that charge of hooch! There it is, on the bar. I am going to count five—" his gun slid from its holster with the smooth ease of an unconscious movement— "and when I say, 'Five' I shall drill a .45 hole in that board your left foot is on. So step up like a little man and take your medicine! One—two—three—four— Jump, you girl-face—*five!*"

The gun crashed and spat its slanting tongue of flame. The girl-face never flicked an eyelash.

"Why didn't you jump, you green-eyed image?"

Parsons was exasperated. It is neither pleasant nor popular to shoot an unresisting man, even if you merely bark his leg, and Parsons felt he had weakened his hold on his audience.

He noted that no blood came from the rent in the stranger's new boot.

"What do you tote a gun for, Montmorency?" he asked tauntingly. "Or are you scared paralyzed and speechless?"

"I don't carry a gun to shoot fools with," was the surprizing remark of the stranger, as he swung it out of his belt and laid it, holster and all, on the bar. Then he faced about to say to Parsons' face—

"What you need is a licking!"

"My prayers are answered." Parsons spoke with reverent gravity, as he handed his belt and gun to a bystander. "It has come to life and it begs to be licked. Far be it from me to disappoint it!"

He rubbed his hands as he stepped back a pace to ask:

"What'll it be? Queensbury, London Prize Ring, or t' —— with rules?"

"T' —— with rules!" snapped the green-eyed one. "You talk too much—get action!"

"I'm a-comin'!"

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THE stranger stood with his back toward the bar when Parsons made an eager spring for him with arms outstretched. The new man simply dropped backward, seizing Parsons by the collar and pulling him forward and downward with him in his fall. But as his back touched the floor he placed both feet in Parsons' lower stomach and straightened his bent legs with a quick thrust upward.

Parsons, aided by his own spring, left the floor lightly. Soaring over the bar in a twisting somersault, he alighted with a crash on the glittering pyramid of bottles and glasses on the buffet before the large mirror. He found himself perched upon this tinkling throne in a sitting posture with no harm done but the breakage.

Below him his audience stared, open-mouthed, and in the open space stood the green-eyed youth who had snapped to his feet and now stood almost, but not quite, smiling up at him.

Parsons was no blood-thirsty man-eater, and he had an appreciation of dramatic values. Any violent move toward vengeance would be an anti-climax and, moreover, he keenly relished the quaint situation. He picked a comfortable place for his feet among the fragments on the buffet, sat up gravely and pulled down his vest while he cast about the circle of upturned faces a severe judicial gaze.

"Ahem, gentlemen." He cleared his throat as if for a speech. "What is the meaning of this unseemly interruption? I take it that—something has happened to interrupt the festivities, but not being present at the time I— Gun-Shy—" in a severe and threatening bass voice—"tell the gentlemen of the jury what happened."

"I dunno." Gun-Shy, relieved by the sudden change to comedy, grinned and threw a bony thumb over his shoulder. "Ask him." And as he wiped off the bar mechanically, he added, "Whatever he done it was a-plenty."

The audience of men accustomed to sudden death seemed to agree with the furtive little bartender. Although grimly amused at Parsons' fooling, they still stared astonished at the stranger who had so easily tossed in the air a man noted for his fighting qualities.

It was before the day of general interest in ju-jutsu, and this simplest of all Japanese tricks looked to them like a miracle. Parsons' sudden change of front was only a twist of grim pleasantry in their eyes; but this exhibition of manhandling raised the strange youth in their esteem immeasurably, and even Gun-Shy felt it.

"He must 've traveled with a circus," he commented. "I see a Jap do that once with a paper-barrel; but I never see a man boosted so high."

"You are a person of discernment, Gun-Shy, which is better than education," stated Parsons, who was a Harvard man himself—*né* Sawin. "I will now descend blushing from my canopy to tender an official welcome to the stranger in our midst."

He vaulted the bar lightly and offered his hand to Wheeler with a sudden smile like a sunrise that showed all his strong white teeth:

"I am known to the populace as Dude Parsons because I am so pretty and, in my humble opinion, we'd make a team. I am glad to meet Mr.—er——"

"Wheeler—Dan Wheeler," Dan said in his softest voice as he took the offered hand in a velvet-steel grip.

In response he smiled his little half-smile that showed only the very edge of even white teeth, but had a pull few men could resist.

"Mr. Wheeler, thanks. Gentlemen, my friend Mr. Wheeler can drink lemonade or any —— thing he thinks he wants. And any man who has remarks to make can make 'em to me. Mr. Wheeler, to our better acquaintance." He raised his glass. "Gun-Shy, where's the gentleman's lemonade?"

"I have changed my mind," said Dan, raising the glass of whisky to the light. "Your health, Mr. Parsons!"

"Sir, to you!"

And they bowed ceremoniously. The glasses were filled again, and young Dan was complimented by some of the company who wished to set 'em up indefinitely.

"I am sorry, gentlemen, but two is my limit tonight," said Dan. "After the third drink I am sure to get insulted, and all bets are off. Tonight I have got to keep cool and responsible."

"I'm liking you better every minute," Parsons announced frankly. "Tell me, did I bark your foot?"

"Not a bit. It was a good shot," said Dan, "and I had a hunch we were going to get acquainted. Also that you were going to the Lazy-X with us. I never lost out on a hunch yet."

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"You win again—I am your property. Are you in Uncle U's outfit? I am looking for him." Parsons put on his belt and gun. "And so are Cinch Masters and the 'Educated Chinaman.' Let's go gather 'em in."

But before Wheeler could get on his own belt to follow, Parsons saw the man he was looking for just entering the barroom.

"Here's Cinch now. Cinch, come and meet Mr. Wheeler. We are all going to the Lazy-X together."

"Since when? I thought you said you'd go on no such wild-goose chase," asked the quiet, dark-haired young man called Cinch Masters.

"That was before I met Mr. Wheeler here. Wait until you see him perform. You are too dumb silent and sober, Cinch. Shake hands with Dan Wheeler and take a good look at him."

"Pleased to meet Mr. Wheeler—" Masters was reserved and spoke with careful precision— "but I don't see that he makes much noise."

"Not with his mouth—any more than you do—but you ought to see him use his feet. Most persuasive feet I ever got in the pit of my stomach, and you can see by his eyes that things are due to happen."

With such colorful and careless rattle, which nevertheless showed his rare power of reading faces, Parsons ornamented his tale of the encounter in which he had come off a poor second.

Masters, who was painfully shy, could not talk before so many staring men, men who were nudging one another and pointing out the famous Indian-fighter and gunman.

"Let's get out of here before I get to drinking and start something," he suggested. "Where is Uncle U? I've got him a cook."

"Just what I was telling Wheeler here," said Parson, answering Dan's questioning look. "Or didn't I mention that the Educated Chinaman said he was sent by a friend of Uncle U in Chicago, and that he's a cook?"

"No. And I didn't mention that Uncle has gone to Fort Worth—and I am supposed to be boss until he gets back," said the blushing Dan. "But I want a cook and I know he wants you fellows."

"Then let's get the Chinaman and go to bed," Masters said, moving toward the front entrance. "He's over at the eating-house."

"*S-s-st!*" a passing stranger hissed in Masters' ear. "Look at the window!"

Wheeler, close behind, heard and saw in an eye-flash a picture he never lost.

In an open window behind and on their right was the head and shoulders of the man Upson—no mistaking the mangy black whiskers and close-set black eyes. Standing outside, he had in one hand the bridle-reins of his horse and in the other a revolver aimed at Masters' back. He was leaning forward and to one side to avoid the back of an unconscious bystander who stood just inside the window.

All this Dan took in as the whispered warning was still in his ears.

In the moment of horror, while he felt the hair on his neck bristle, Dan was acting with his uncanny swiftness, seizing Masters by the left shoulder and turning him toward the window while pulling him a step aside, thus saving the life of the famous young gun-fighter.

With a smooth and lightning-quick movement Masters' gun came out and up as he turned, crashing almost in unison with the report from the window.

Through a lane of dodging men Dan saw Upson's darkly sallow face lose its vicious twist. With the roaring echo of the guns a clean black hole appeared between the narrow-set eyes. The body flopped awkwardly forward over the window-sill—the gun discharging again in the limp hand—flopped and hung head-down like an ugly scarecrow.

The broad-brimmed hat had fallen bottom-up on the floor inside, and into it ran a smooth, red stream of blood from the inverted head, filling it as a faucet fills a basin.

Through a small door behind the bar came the proprietor of the place, a dapper little man in a brown velvet coat. He pushed his way round the end of the bar and through the gathering press of men, roughly pulled the body around until he could see the dead face with the welling hole between the eyes.

"A plumb-center shot," was his comment. "The ——! Didn't he know better than to draw on you, Mr. Masters?"

His hard thin-lipped face showed only annoyed disgust.

"Shot at him from behind—the —— skunk!" growled several witnesses in chorus. "He got what was comin' to him."

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"Drag him out back," directed the owner, turning away from the window and wiping his hands on a bar-towel, while the crowd made admiring comments on the quickness of Masters' draw. "This place needs a good marshal—a man like you, Mr. Masters. There's too much gun-play in town these days and it's bad for business. Better think it over." The proprietor was one of the solid citizens of Gopher.

"Thank you," said Masters quietly. "But I have got a job for the season. If I am wanted about this shooting——"

"You won't be—" with a grim tight smile—"unless it's to get a vote of thanks. Good night, Mr. Masters!"

With a nod of grave respect and farewell the proprietor turned on the crowd with a caustic snarl.

"Stand and gawp! A man would think you never saw a man shot before. Gangway here! There are men outside." And he shouldered his way to the dance-hall.

OUTSIDE under the stars Masters turned to Wheeler. "Only for you they'd be dragging me out about now. You pulled me out of the line of that bullet—I felt it fan my sleeve—and you must have done some quick thinking."

"What? Thinking?" Dan shook himself and seemed to come out of an intent study. "No, you don't think at such times. You do your thinking afterward."

And even as he spoke he felt himself flush. He was giving information to Cinch Masters, a man who, though hardly older than himself, had downed his man in a dozen gun-duels. But Masters only remarked:

"Then you're one of the lucky ones—you think so quick you don't know it. Some day it will save your skin as it saved mine tonight. I'll not fo'get it, suh!"

It was only in emotional moments that Masters' Southern birth showed in his speech. Young Wheeler sensed the tension and hurriedly asked a question.

"What did that man Upson want to shoot you for?"

Under other circumstances it would have been an ill-mannered and prying question in that country; but Masters overlooked it.

"I can't tell you. He hinted about big money that I could get for a job he didn't mention, and I told him I had a job already. I didn't like the bunch of thieves and hired killers he traveled with, but I didn't tell him so. That's all that passed between us."

As he unhitched his pony at the rail Masters noted the unusual silence of Parsons, who had dropped behind a few steps.

"What's the matter with you, Dude? When you don't talk you are sick—did one of those stray bullets find you?"

"Ye-e-es, of course," Parsons snarled disgustedly as he limped up, looking rather pale in the starlight. "Of course that last shot had to catch me in the off hind laig; but it's only a crease—wait till we get to camp——"

But he let go the hitch-rail and sat down weakly in the sand, remarking—

"The —— thing must have leaked more'n I thought."

While Masters put a neat bandage on the wound Parsons continued his exasperated comments:

"Just my cussed luck. I'm the only one of the three of us that nobody tries to hit—and I get it. It's just plain ——! But I can ride, all right. Give me a leg up."

"You'll ride in a covered wagon for a few days," Masters said. "I might have known you were hit bad when you were so quiet. We'll put you up side-saddle fashion. Now take your ankle in one hand—that's the way—and we can make camp all right."

"But we got to have a cook," Parsons protested. "What's a camp without a cook?"

"We can send back for him. Come on."

And riding one on each side in case the wounded man should faint and fall off, they rode slowly out to the camp in the outskirts.

On the way Wheeler told Masters of Uncle U's rare threat upon seeing Upson and his party. Masters took the matter seriously and asked a few thoughtful questions, after which he ventured the prophecy, "There's more to this."

He said it again when Wheeler showed him the location of the camp where he and Uncle U had seen Upson only a few hours before. It was now deserted, and a dying fire showed it had been left within an hour.

When they reached their own camp in the edge of the cottonwoods, one of the cowboys came to meet them while they were helping Parsons from his horse.

"Another one?" he asked dryly. "This looks like war. Somebody took a pop at Benson here, and whoever did it was after the Old Man himself."

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Benson was sitting up with a bandaged head and he explained apologetically:

"I put on Uncle U's old jacket and Stetson to give an imitation to amuse the boys," he began hurriedly. "And I heard a noise like somebody was prowlin' round the horses. When I went out there to see, somebody put a bullet through my hat—Uncle U's old Stetson—and creased my scalp enough to knock me out. While I was asleep they went through my clothes. They didn't get anything unless Uncle U left something in that jacket."

"We thought Bense had fired to scare off horse-thieves," one of the other cowboys added. "But when he didn't answer us we went and found him. This was on the ground near him."

He handed Masters a long feather. The wise young Indian-fighter hardly looked at the feather.

"An eagle-feather—a Cheyenne wore that. Any other Indian-signs?"

"No; but they say there was two renegade Cheyennes in one of the camps over yonder."

Masters made no further comment; but while he was looking after his own horse Wheeler followed to ask him—

"Will you tell me what this means and what I'd better do about it?"

"It means somebody is after Uncle U," Masters promptly answered. "And after they thought they'd got him, Upson came to the Hoffman House to put me out of the way before they cleared out."

"But what did they—or Upson—have against you?"

"Well—" diffidently—"maybe they thought I'd be right troublesome—I never did like to have my friends shot right under my nose, as you might say." Then in a still softer voice, "I regyard Uncle U as a mighty nice old gentleman."

Dan felt a warm glow inside his vest toward this soft-voiced but capable young man, but he could not express it. Instead he asked—

"Think we'd better go to meet Uncle U and King—some of us?"

"Hardly. Upson ain't likely to trouble him now. I'd have things all ready to start for the Border when Uncle U gets here—if I were you."

"The first thing is to get that cook—the Educated Chinaman—to get breakfast for us," Dan decided briskly.

"I can cook if I have to," Masters stated. "But here is the real thing right now."

For at that precise moment Chance came riding back to camp after a dull poker-game in town, and behind him rode a bland Chinaman in his native costume.

"He was lookin' for Uncle U's camp," Chance told the welcoming circle. "His name is Lu Yan and he can cook in five languages."

"Including the language of wisdom," said Lu Yan in perfect English as he slid to the ground, bundle in hand.

"That's Chinese, of course," put in Parsons, who was feeling better after a short rest, grinning cheerfully.

"No. The language of wisdom is silence," said the oriental gently.

"Ouch! I'm going to bed," said Parsons. "You needn't swell up, Cinch. You'd have stopped cold lead yourself if it hadn't been for the boss."

Lu Yan was looking them all over with the serene intelligence that marks the high-class Chinese gentleman. As Parsons indicated Wheeler as the man in command, Lu Yan took a small paper from his frock and held it toward Dan.

"It is a letter from my friend Lon Cheng, in Chicago."

"My friend too," Dan said, gravely taking the Chinaman's hand. "I am mighty glad to see you. This letter is addressed to Uncle U—I'll keep it for him. That's the chuck-wagon over there and if you want any help to find things——"

"I will find everything—you can forget all about it."

It was a large statement, but Lu Yan made it perfectly good.

Breakfast proved that he was a model cook. He did quiet and unobtrusive miracles with the materials furnished, and the meals he spread for them became the constant wonder of the outfit all during their desert journey.

Without good food it would not have been possible to keep the men satisfied, but they were more than satisfied with Lu Yan and his cooking, and they treated him with marked deference from the very first.

Having posted a guard to watch the horses, Dan rolled in his blankets under the clear southern stars, feeling that he had carried out Uncle U's orders. He had filled out the quota of men, and they were a picked crew.

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If they did not know exactly the work that was ahead of them, they at least seemed cheerfully ready to tackle it. And with Masters to aid him by advice and backing he had no doubt he could keep them in hand for the day or two before Uncle U's return.

He forgot the horror that had chilled him at the sight of swift death in the barroom window. He was warmed and elated by the finding of a friend—the sort of friend one likes and trusts on sight—as he pictured on the dark of his closed eyes the strong and darkly handsome face of Cinch Masters.

III

BY MID-AFTERNOON of the next day everything was ready for the start across the desert as soon as Uncle U and his ranch-manager should return. Masters had acted as Dan's lieutenant and adviser. Knowing that they were really under the direction of the most famous of Indian-fighters and plainsmen, the men had worked hard and cheerfully. As a result everything was packed and loaded with the exception of Uncle U's small private tent which was left ready to receive him.

Then, a full twenty-four hours before they were expected, Uncle U and King came riding into camp. Both were worn with fatigue. Even King was too hoarse and tired to talk and slid from his horse to the ground where he lay panting and croaking for water. The grim old man staggered to his tent where Lu Yan took him hot tea of his own motion and came out to report to Dan—

"He wishes to speak to you."

Wheeler found his old chief sitting on his cot, head in hands. He did not look up, but said hoarsely: "Read Lon Cheng's letter. Too late, probably, but read it."

Dan took from his pocket the small folded paper Lu Yan had brought from his friend the Chinese merchant in Chicago. It contained three lines written in a clear hand.

> Your purpose is known and they are on the way. They go through the mountains to the northward. You must reach the Border first. Lu Yan is a friend. LON CHENG.

"I expected it," Uncle U groaned. "So I turned back—too late. They will beat me and I lose six years' work. I'm an old man and it doesn't matter; but I wanted to leave the kid on velvet."

"The kid?" Dan blurted. "What kid?"

"My sister's little girl, the only kin I got." Uncle U repeated the words dully. "Now she'll grow up a pauper. She's in school back East, but she'll have to go to work now. I wanted her to be rich; but they'll get to the ranch and rob me after all. Upson and the rest of 'em have got a whole day's lead, and they'll stir up the Border bandits."

Dan was straining his ears to get the muffled words which he only half-understood, tense with a desire to help. But at the mention of Upson he saw light.

"Upson's dead," he announced sharply. "Masters shot him last night. After they—somebody—tried to kill Benson, taking him for you, Upson went after Cinch and got killed. I saw Masters kill him at the hotel."

"What! Upson dead?" Uncle U's head came up, his gray face blank with stunned surprize. "And Masters here already—I didn't see him—where is he?"

"Gone to see if there's another party ready to start with us. We are packed and ready."

"Ready—ready to start, and Masters here?" Slowly hope came into the haggard face and gave it life and color. "What's this about taking young Benson for me—quick!"

In a few words Dan told what had happened the evening before, speeding up as he saw eager delight and determination in Uncle U's expression. The old man was transformed, alert and dominant.

"It's a plumb miracle—" he slapped his knee and held out a hand— "boy, gimme your hand! This day's work's the best you ever did. We've got a chance yet, and if we win you'll have something to remember it by." He was on his feet now, erect and forceful, gripping Wheeler's hand with electric vigor.

"Where's Cinch? Is Parsons able to ride? We ride tonight, even if we start alone. Come on!"

He was out of the tent, Dan on his heels, just in time to see Masters dismounting with a heavy Sharps rifle in his hand.

"'Lo, Cinch! Glad to see ye. What luck?" was Uncle U's crisp greeting.

"Murdock's outfit is ready and waiting," Masters said as he shook hands. "Eight men—no women or children—and I got a real gun, worth six Winchesters if we meet up with Injuns."

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"Right! Go tell Murdock we start in an hour—strike that tent and load it while the cook gets supper—we'll ride all night with a two-hour halt for water. King, look after those pack-horses." From a gray and hopeless old man, Uncle U had become a cyclone of energy and cheerful inspiration.

"Ain't he a wonder, that old skeezicks?" King asked Dan as he showed him how to begin a diamond-hitch. "I rise to remark that —— is b'ilin' now—we're off on the jump. Look at him now! And we been riding all day and all night, till I'm nothing but a mess of bitter memories and blisters. I can tell you right now, there's something on that ranch besides grass and cattle."

Wheeler was to recall that prophecy later; but at the moment Uncle U was keeping every man on the jump in some final preparations.

"Hey!" he shouted at King. "Pack that canvas on a hoss. Parsons' saddle-pony—he's got to ride a wagon for a couple days. What y' doin' with them poles? Sling 'em to the reach where they won't take up any room. You, Hall! Ain't ye got any sense? I never see such a mess o' numbskulls. That pack won't ride a holy minute; it's slippin' a'ready. Here, git out the way. Pass me that rope for'ard—like that, see? Look out— Whoa! There; serves ye right. Hurt ye much, boy?" dropping to a lower tone full of anxious sympathy, as a pack-mule raised young Hall into the air by a short-range kick.

"Nah, didn't hurt me none." Hall got up grinning. "Takes more'n a mule to put a dent in me. I was on his hocks anyhow. He didn't get no swing at me. But what's the clawin' rush—war with Mexico?"

"Tell ye soon's I git time," snapped Uncle U. "We got to be ready and our supper et, when Murdock's outfit comes along—anyway, you'll git paid for it."

"Oh, I was only talkin'," the cowboy mumbled good-naturedly. "I ain't kickin'; but one of the boys was askin' whether we was hired to punch cattle or to clean up Ribera and his bunch of Border bandits."

Uncle U noted that Chance, the silent cowboy, was listening. He answered crisply:

"Both, mebbe—tell ye presently. Talk less and move faster."

When every hitch was made fast and supper eaten, it was quite a different leader who made a brief speech to his men. He spoke with dignity, choosing his words:

"Boys, I hired you at double-pay to work on the Lazy-X for the season. I picked you fellows—fighters and men of nerve—in case we had to stand off Indians on the way, or rustlers and thieves after we got there. I'll admit we might have a brush with Ribera and his Border bandits."

As he mentioned the terror of the Border, he paused to look about the circle of bronzed and toughened faces. Not one showed surprize or dismay. He went on frankly:

"Since then I have found out it is worse than that. It's a toss-up whether we find anything left on the ranch when we get there—we won't unless we get there first—and if we don't I'll be on my uppers. But I've got the cash to pay you—two months' pay for two weeks' work—and you get it the day we reach the Lazy-X, whether you stay with me or not. It's not far from the Lazy-X to Tucson.

"If any man wants his pay for one week—wants to quit now—now's the time to say so."

He took out a roll of bills and wet his thumb, looking straight at Chance the silent. Chance was whittling a match for a toothpick and did not look up.

Just then, rounding a bend in the trail where it approached the camp, appeared a file of horsemen and covered wagons.

"Here's Murdock and his outfit," said Masters, mounting his pony. "Everybody up!"

Every man mounted and the start was made toward the sinking sun that shot its almost level beams fiercely into their faces. With Masters leading the file of horses and wagons, they took the trail in front of Murdock's party without even a pause for introductions.

The two parties were traveling together for the first Indian-infested part of the journey, for reasons of safety. There was no call for social forms or observances. They could ride and fight together without a formal presentation, and all but young Wheeler were men who knew the grim business that was before them.

The much-traveled trail traversed the desert near its northern border, crossing the arms of sandy plain that the desert thrust northward between the dwindling southern ends of several ranges of the Rocky Mountains. The reason for this was that the caravans must not be farther than a day's journey from water and horse-bait.

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But it also meant that for days at a time the travelers were within reach of thieving or bad-hearted Indians. Lo may much prefer to make war when the sun is shining, but he steals at any time of day or night when the stealing is good. So it behooved the wayfarer of those days to keep an eye out by day and to post sentinels over his live-stock by night.

IV

THE second night out, it fell to the lot of Dan to stand the first watch of the night. He had been told to keep a keen lookout to the leeward of the horses and mules, because they would give notice themselves of any redskins prowling between them and the wind.

The camp had just got quiet, settled for deep sleep, although a lantern still burned in Uncle U's small tent. Wheeler had just begun a bitter fight against the drowsiness of utter fatigue when he heard Masters' low voice behind him:

"Uncle wants to speak to you—I'll keep watch. He's over there, on that knoll."

Dan could barely make out a dark squatting figure on a sandy mound a few rods north of the camp. As he came near he could see that the old man sat on his heels, face toward a low wooded hill still farther to the north. Without raising his head, Uncle U spoke as he heard Dan's step crunch the sand.

"It looks 's if they'd git me this time, Dan."

His voice, low and tired, was like the voice of a man walking in his sleep. And he used all his Yankee dialect as he went on:

"If they git me you'd ought to know it all—what I never told a soul but Lon Cheng, not even Eli Brant. You was a born killer, son, but I liked ye from the start. Then I owed ye something for killin' Snead, so I sold ye the eighth share in the di'monds for little o' nothin'. Now I got to tell ye how to git 'em if I die."

Dan started slightly, and Uncle U seemed to feel it. He shook his head impatiently.

"I know—it sounds crazy, but it ain't—you wait. No use tellin' the whole yarn. Here's the gist on it: I made money on the ranch and divided it with Eli Brant fair and square; but six year ago I stumbled on gold—not an ore-body, but placer-gold and pockets. I had to wash some on it out nights on the sly; but there was nuggets, big ones, and it counted up fast. Had to smuggle it out, so Ribera wouldn't git it—a long, hard job. Tired me out—" his voice weakened, but he suddenly raised his head. "Where was I? So —— tired——"

"Smuggling it out," Dan suggested gently. "But what about diamonds—did you mean to say diamonds?"

"Yes, sir!" snapped Uncle U, spurred to exasperation by the pity in Dan's tone. "I said di'monds and I meant di'monds—a lot o' di'monds. Snead got suspicious, and that's why— Never mind that. I want to tell ye how it come. I had to keep it dark about the gold. If it got out it would start a stampede, take my men off the ranch and spoil the game.

"Then Ribera—next-door neighbor down there—was snoopin' around. I'd last about a minute after they found out—Snead in Chicago and Ribera on the Border. Only one way I could figger it out to dodge 'em and the spies they had out. I smuggled the gold to Lon Cheng—you can bet on a Chinaman—and he took it to New York to change it into di'monds, a little at a time.

"I didn't dare even put the di'monds in safe-deposit—never thought much of banks, so I took 'em all back to the ranch and hid 'em in the one place on earth where Ribera *never'd think to look!* Di'monds are easy carried and easy hid, and they're down there yet. We got to git 'em—one of us—if they don't git us first."

"Nobody's going to get us," said Dan. "Don't worry!"

"I ain't so sure—there was two Injuns in those woods off there. I saw 'em—so did Lu Yan—before dark. So I made out two writin's in the tent; one tellin' where to find the di'monds, and the other givin' you four boys a share for gettin' 'em if I die—gettin' 'em for the kid. Then I been thinkin' it ain't safe to have it on paper. No tellin' what might happen now they're after us. I figure it like this: I better burn these papers and tell ye where to find the di'monds—Hark! See anything by that clump o' trees?"

Uncle U's hoarse whisper roused in Dan's mind a sudden suspicion that the old man's mind was not right. He had worried himself half-insane perhaps.

"There's nothing there," he said quietly. "You are tired out and need sleep."

"Sleep nothin'! Sleep with these papers worryin' me? What if——"

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"Then burn them right now. Here's a natch. Then go to sleep."

"I guess I better, after I tell ye where to ook for the di'monds."

Uncle U stood up with the two sheets of aper in his hand and lighted them at the natch Dan held for him.

The flame flared up in the still night air, ringing out sharply against the dark the een old face, frowning. As the light began o fail a low hiss sounded past Dan's ear—nded with a soft thud.

Uncle U gasped, his knees doubled and he lropped to the earth. By the last flicker of he burning paper as it fell Dan saw the haft and feathered butt of an arrow, standng up straight and ugly in the still chest.

Shivering with a thrill of rage, as Dan tood over the body of his old friend every uman thought and feeling left him. He vas dizzy with rage and thirst for revenge.

Out of the dark Masters came, saying as ie stumbled over the prone body:

"What was that? I thought I heard an rrow——"

"See to him!" rasped Dan hoarsely.

He started running toward the wooded lope far to the northward. He never could xplain why he took that direction. The earest cover, the only cover within bowhot was the clump of trees Uncle U had ointed out; but Wheeler ran in a true line o the edge of the more distant wood. On he way he saw two shadows that kept lmost abreast, but under cover of the trees ie swerved only to mount the incline at a slight angle.

When he topped the rise he found himself on a flat table-land with a clear lookout over the sandy plain he had crossed. It seemed lighter now—a lighter gray—and over it the two shadows were still coming on steadily toward the wooded bluff but farther to the right. He changed his course to meet them as they reached the rise, sprinting along the rim of the bluff without any conscious effort.

Now they were out of sight under the heavy trees below him on his right. He halted by instinct just in time to save himself from a dive down a steep sandy slope.

At his feet was a deep dry arroyo. This was the opening the two shadows had been making for, away from the plain into the hills to the north. At the mouth of the arroyo they must soon appear. He drew his Colt and dropped to his face on the very rim. At the same moment he noticed that a waning moon was rising, sending its pale rays straight down the sandy gulch.

As he waited for Uncle U's murderers to appear he was seething with the lust to kill them. He felt not the slightest doubt as to the result, not a suspicion that they might not be the guilty ones, and his fighting-head was abnormally clear. His every sense was alert and intensified—he was an engine of destruction that could neither feel nor fail. Although he was panting heavily, he was grim of purpose and steady of hand.

Into the moonlight came a mounted savage at an easy canter, blanket flapping gently with the movement of the horse. When the rider was just opposite at the gulley-bottom, Dan fired. The horse stumbled, fell and threw the Indian headlong.

The second rider was close after and without a second's pause Dan fired again. With the report the second horse shied at his fallen companion, and the shot missed. A third shot did no better, but the next one brought down the horse in a sidelong fall that rolled him over his rider.

Dan was plunging and sliding down the sandy slope straight at the second Indian who had staggered to his feet although he was badly hurt. The savage had arrows at his back, but from the sand he was picking up a Winchester as Dan reached the bottom of the gulch.

Rushing straight at the mouth of the leveled rifle, Dan leaped to one side at the precise moment that it flamed. Two more tiger-like bounds brought him to the savage. Knocking up the rifle as it flamed again, Dan fired with the muzzle of his Colt almost on the Indian's ribs.

Before the dying man had fairly reached the ground Wheeler was over him and at the first-fallen savage who had been stunned, but got to his feet unhurt. Although the red man still had a long knife at his belt he took to his legs, running up the arroyo with the swift easy stride of the Indian runner.

The red man may have felt by instinct that his assailant was one of those who have what he would have called "big medicine," or he may have gone rabbit-hearted at the sight of the encounter with his companion. In any case he had a fair lead, he was unwinded and fresh and he ran for his life toward the hills.

Without thought of fatigue or the chance

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of ambush Dan took after him, revolver in hand and teeth hard set. Some time, a long time after and more than two miles up the endless arroyo, Wheeler overhauled the spent and fear-struck Indian. Staggering with weakness, breathing in sobbing gasps from the killing pace in shifting sand, the Indian turned and drew his knife.

Dan flung himself forward with the last effort of his leaden legs. As the two came to earth together, Dan, shifting his gun to hold the barrel in his hand, put all his remaining strength into one downward smash at the bare forehead before his eyes. With skull crushed like a shell the red man stiffened where he fell.

There was a stinging pain in his side, but Dan was too weak to move, too utterly spent to take his head off the still warm corpse. He lay panting, aching with fatigue, but grimly satisfied—in his nostrils the heavy sickly smell of fresh warm blood that steamed in the cold moonlight.*

As soon as he could breathe without pain he dropped asleep, his last conscious memory being a deep heart-warming pleasure in the feel of that last smash with gun-butt on breaking skull.

V

BACK at the camp where Masters had roused King and Lu Yan to help him bring Uncle U in, every other tired man still slept the sleep of complete exhaustion except Parsons. He was hobbling about on his crutches in pathetic attempts to be of use, wiping his eyes and swearing to himself. He had been sleeping under the chuck-wagon with Lu Yan, so that Masters had roused him unintentionally, and was everywhere in the way.

Lu Yan had taken charge by the royal right of nerve and knowledge. He had shown how to carry the wounded man on a blanket to the fire where he already had water heating. From somewhere in his clothes he had produced a broad triangular sheath-knife with silver handle and sharp as a razor. With this keen blade he had cut away the clothing and then sheared off the head of the arrow that came out at the back inside the right shoulder-blade. With one quick pull he had plucked out the headless shaft from the front, washed the wound with hot water until bleeding ceased, then bound on pads of clean white cloth toasted brown over the fire. All this he had done quickly, as he explained, "while he sleeps and feels nothing."

After he had got Uncle U to swallow some warm black coffee, the wounded man finally coughed, groaned and opened his eyes to whisper—

"Dan—did they—git him?"

"No!" gulped Parsons, frankly blubbering. "He tore off after the —— redskin that shot you. —— only knows——"

Here he was kicked violently by King.

"'Fraid he'll—git bushwhacked."

Uncle U whispered, but the effort made him cough and brought blood in mouthfuls from the torn lung. While King dragged Parsons out of ear-shot Lu Yan imposed silence on his patient and with the help of Masters got him on his cot; then the two carried him into his tent.

Presently Parsons hobbled back to the fire where King sat with his big head in his big hands. Parsons bore no ill-will—he was too miserable.

"S'pose Dan has got himself killed too," he gulped once more," and the Old Man don't pull through—what'n —— will we do then?"

He hobbled in circles in his sobbing misery.

"Play tag with ourselves like you're doin'," yelped King, who was blubbering himself, groping about for something hard to throw. "You jabberin', jig-dancin', jimber-jawed jackass! Go way from me 'fore I spatter ye all over Texas."

"Awful excitable," whimpered Parsons as he wandered away. "Awful excitable, that man."

Masters was coming out of the tent, looking worried.

"Is he worse? D' I kill him?" asked Parsons plaintively.

"No. He's asleep. You didn't do it—go to bed," said Masters. "You can't do any good prancing around. Where's King?"

"Over there, bawlin'-mad. If he bites you, you'll have hydrophobia."

King, like Parsons, was not only half-hysterical from weariness; he had not been able to think clearly. Masters saw his square-jawed face streaked with tears and forebore to reproach him for losing time.

"Why not take a lantern and see if you can pick up Wheeler's trail?" he asked

*This episode is "a matter of record" from notes of W.'s reminiscences, and W. did not lie. It is also noted that all the time there was another shot in W.'s gun, and he forgot it! J. I. C.

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quietly. "Uncle U is worrying about him——"

"If I'd had the sense of a rotten egg I'd 'a' done it before," King growled, starting on the run with the lantern.

"Don't you get bushwhacked," Masters called after him. "I'll take your trail when there's light enough."

Meanwhile he mounted guard over the camp, walking until daybreak. Every second round of the camp he came back to listen at the tent-flap where Lu Yan sat sleepless and never failing in his care of the sinking patient. There was no surgeon within a week's travel, and nobody could do anything more to save the old man than this capable celestial. Nevertheless Masters felt that he must do something to relieve his feelings, no matter what. As soon as daylight reddened the eastern skyline he called Lu Yan from the tent.

"He sleeps, but always wakes and asks for Dan," said the Chinaman. "He will not live many hours. He knows it and he wants to make his will."

"I'll go get that Dan, if he hasn't got himself killed," said Masters.

"They are hard to kill—these hatchet-men," stated Lu Yan. "King will find him if you wait half an hour."

Startled by such positive assertions, Masters went to the sandy knoll to look across the plain to the north.

"That Chinamen thinks he knows it all," he muttered restlessly. "I am betting that was pure bluff."

But the growing light slowly revealed two mounted men coming across the desert from the wooded foot-hills. They were riding at an easy lope and he soon recognized the gait of King's favorite horse.

Waving an exultant signal to Lu Yan, Masters hurriedly saddled and rode to meet them. He found King had ridden on the Indians' trail with an extra horse for Dan. He was as exultant and proud of Wheeler's exploit as if he had been the hero himself.

"He cut across-lots and bushwhacked those two renegade Cheyennes," King explained. "You ought to see the trail. Talk about luck and nerve! After he downed one of the Indians he ran the other one off his legs—more'n two miles up that arroyo—and finished up the job. He beat 'em at their own game—out-figgered 'em. How'd you come to do it that way?" he asked Dan as they rode in.

"I didn't do any figuring," said Dan. "I lost my temper and went after them. I shot one, then I chased the other and stove in his head with my gun-butt." Which was reducing the story to its lowest terms.

The camp was up and stirring when they got back, circulating the news of the night in whispers while breakfast was in preparation; for not a man but Parsons had been wakened until daybreak. Murdock had just come to get first-hand reports from Lu Yan at the bedside of the dying man.

"He will not last long," said the grave pioneer. "And he is worrying about his will. You had better write what he tells you and have it witnessed. It will hold if it's done right."

"You studied law, Dude." King turned to Parsons. "You got to do it the best you know how, if it's only to ease his mind."

"I'll make a stagger at it," said Parsons. He hobbled to the wagon where writing-materials were packed with the provisions for the ranch.

When Uncle U saw Wheeler at his side he gripped his hand with a pleasure that was pathetic, and he never let go his hold all the time he was dictating his last will and testament to the sniffling Parsons.

Although he was obliged to wipe his eyes often, Parsons got the instrument clearly written. In brief sentences of short words—better than legal repetitions—it set forth that Dan Wheeler already owned one-eighth of the ranch and all on it, including the Stone House. Of the remaining seven-eighths, five-eighths was to go to a girl—"Marion Felton, my sister's child—" and two-eighths was to be divided among five men: Dan Wheeler, Masters, Parsons, King and Lu Yan.

When his signature had been affixed and witnessed, Uncle U whispered that he wanted to speak to Dan, Masters and Lu Yan. After the others had tiptoed from the tent, it seemed for a time as if the old man was about to sink without reviving, but he swallowed some coffee and again resumed his careful whispering.

"Raise my head and come closer—bend lower—give me cold water." After a swallow and a rest, "Dan knows about the di'monds—but not how to get 'em— Go to the Stone House cellar— Water!"

A struggle for breath brought a hemorrhage, and for a time the old man panted weakly. With a grim effort he went on:

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"The long smooth stone—near the ground—with a moon-mark on it—swings if—" A bubbling cough choked him and brought more blood. "Can't open—" weakly panted the dying man; "without—water——"

His effort was unbearable. Masters held the cup to his lips.

"Here is water, uncle."

But the old man weakly turned away his lips.

"No—got to—turn—" a gurgling cough—"Water——"

"Right here, uncle," Masters said. "Never mind the stone."

For once Uncle U obeyed. With a long rattling sigh his head fell forward. He would never again mind stones or anything of earth.

"He—he's gone!"

Masters looked up, eyes wide with astonishment, as if he could not believe it.

VI

"NOW you boys are shareholders in the ranch, you got to have a head."

Murdock was giving advice by their request, as he had already taken charge of the burial on the plain.

"When you get to your ranch, King will manage it if you want, but until you get there you can't afford to lose time taking a vote every time you make a move. Way is, to elect one of you boss and let him be boss as long as he suits."

"That's sense—Wheeler's the man," King assented. "He's the biggest shareholder, and —— knows he don't waste time makin' up his mind."

"Second the motion." Masters and Parsons spoke together.

"All in favor—he's elected. Congratulate you, Mr. Wheeler." Murdock gravely offered his hand. "If you think like I do, we better get to going right away. What say?"

"Suits me," Dan said with a flush. "If Masters still leads on the march."

"I shall have to if you give the order," said Masters.

"Then let's go on."

Dan took a last look at the grave of his old friend as he mounted and took his place in line.

It seemed unfeeling to leave him there on the lonely plain so soon after his death; but there must be no delay if they were to reach the Lazy-X in time to save the ranch and the cache. Uncle U would urge them to hurry, to save the hidden diamonds for "the kid." That was why he had willed a generous share of his wealth to the five beneficiaries—in order that Marion Felton might get her share.

Dan was not the sort of man to make silent vows, or vows of any kind; but that kid would get what was coming to her if there was anything left of the ranch when they got there.

Mourning is not a favorite sport of youth. One does not stay long under a cloud of bereavement when one is in the early twenties if one is normal and busy. And Dan was busy, busy and very much alive. When he had time to think about it he was warmed all through by the trust shown in him as leader of these men. For he was not only respected already, but popular and admired for his dash and courage. His reserve and readiness to take advice added the finishing touch that raised him still higher in the esteem of these men of action.

He learned the tricks of plainsmanship as he had taken to the use of a Colt, with the precocious eagerness of a born explorer and pioneer. He even became an easy and confident rider and in the clear desert air he bronzed and hardened. The strength and healthy force of young manhood was humming in his blood as he developed in this new and kind environment.

For he was more than popular as a leader. His wrestling-trick with Parsons and his pursuit of the two Indians had established him in the general estimation as a full man and a dangerous one. That was all that was necessary to give free rein to the rare charm of his personality.

There is, now and then, a man whose surplus virility is hidden under an exterior almost feminine, or whose finer fiber is shown in an outward fineness of feature, in a comeliness and mystery almost effeminate. Such men possess for both sexes an attraction quite abnormal. When a strong man feels it, his expression thereof usually takes the form of horse-play, roughness or abuse.

Such a man was young Wheeler, and the men of his party became devoted admirers. Their admiration reached the bounds of superstitious awe when it was whispered

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about the camp that he was the man that downed Smiling Snead.

Of them all perhaps none felt more genuine admiration for young Dan than the rough and burly foreman, King. And King was one of those whose well-meaning vitality often took the form of what then passed for practical jokes. Thereby came a twist to our tale—and an outcome unexpected.

It was the fourth day after Uncle U's burial, shortly after the noon stop for food and half-warm water that was carried in kegs. It was one of the hottest of the broiling desert days, but they could not take a longer nooning during the most unbearable heat; for they were not halfway across the broadest stretch of treeless, waterless sand that they had so far encountered. They must plod on until after dusk to reach Forty-mile water-hole for the night's camp. Except for a low range of mountains swimming in a thick haze far to the north, there was nothing in sight but desert sand—sand that billowed, parched and simmered in the rays of a merciless sun.

Masters was riding in the lead as usual, quiet and saturnine, apparently untroubled by the heat or the fine dust that filled mouths, noses and eyes, whitened every surface and rose in a cloud that floated over and behind the long train of wagons and horses. Only, now and then, he sent a long steady look toward the distant mountains to the northward.

It was after one of these long looks that he swung his horse about and raised his hand to signal for halt, with one quick hoarse word—

"Indians!"

WHEELER, riding next in line, had been following the direction of Masters' gaze. For some seconds he could make out nothing in the wavering haze. Then from the dim treeline of the distant foothills a small string of ant-like insects trickled down and out on the plain. Perhaps twoscore of the little black objects had come down, to disappear for a moment in a hollow, appear again on a rise, dip from sight and reappear. Each time a bit nearer, a bit larger. They were mounted savages and coming fast.

"Masters, you're the man to boss this job." Dan spoke with sharp decision. "I never saw an Indian attack—all I know is what King has told me. You run this show. Will you?"

"Yes." Masters wasted no valuable time in affected protests. "I will if you'll do as I say."

"Good! Give your orders."

"Ride down the line and tell them I'm to give orders—both outfits!"

"That's good business." Murdock had ridden up and now assented. "I was going to ask the same. And we're lucky to have Cinch Masters here to give orders."

He turned to Masters to add, "That boy has got sense," with a jerk of his head toward Dan, who had started down the line of standing horses and wagons, shouting:

"Masters in command! All take orders from Masters!"

"Didn't I hear you say you'd got a buffalo-gun?" Masters asked Murdock.

"Yes. Sharps—a good one." Masters smiled grimly. "If those redskins take us for emigrants—half women and children—they are in for a surprize."

Murdock nodded cheerfully as he rode back to his place. He knew that there was not much danger of a bad killing if the defense was in the capable hands of Mr. Masters, and he rather relished the prospect.

Dan, however, had been posted on Indian raids by King—overposted. That was a part of the big foreman's playful plan, to paint an attack by redskins as a bloody and desperate affair at any time.

When young Wheeler had reached the end of the line, he turned to see that Masters was leading the head of the file aside from the trail. He rode about in a circle, followed by the whole line which closed up the spaces at the same time. The result was that when Masters and the lead-wagon had reached a place behind and to one side of the one that had brought up the rear, there was formed a continuous hollow circle of covered wagons. Just inside this were the pack and saddle horses, some of which had been trained to lie down, and in the inmost circle were the dismounted men with their Winchesters. Each man had more or less shelter and a rest for his rifle.

Masters, dismounted, stood in the center. He gave his orders briskly, watching the approaching Indians between times.

"Murdock, take your Sharps and get in the middle of the north side. King next—leave a place for me—then Parsons—Kelly—Hall——"

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Each man took his place as he was named, lay down and fixed their rests, then took an experimental squint through their sights. When the northern half of the circle was fully manned, Masters came to stand near Murdock as he issued final commands.

"Don't fire till I give the word—then pump it to 'em fast until they split to circle round. Murdock and I will each cut loose with his Sharps before they are in Winchester range—but don't get anxious and waste ammunition.

"After they circle round to form on the south side, every man cross over and take the same place to face them—then repeat. Every man got his shells handy? All ready? Good! Don't get anxious. There'll be plenty of redskins for everybody."

It was a long speech for Masters and got a few hand-claps of subdued applause as the young general lay down to sight his heavy rifle.

All this time the Indians had been coming on, halting well out of rifle-range to form their line of battle and to breathe their ponies. They made a brilliant and savagely splendid show in their paint and gaily fluttering feathers which made each warrior look twice his actual size.

King crept nearer to Masters and whispered:

"Watch young Wheeler. See if he shows signs of shaky nerve when the Injuns make their second charge from the other side."

"Nothing strange if he did," Masters answered in a low, grave tone. "I wanted to run first time I faced a charge of bucks, I remember. It would scare anybody. But what about the second charge? You been up to some of your foolishness?" turning his head for a suspicious look.

"Just a little one," King grinned sheepishly. "Couldn't let it slip." With a quick look Dan's way he explained. "I told him last night they was just bluffing the first time—they'd divide and go round; but if they charged back from the other side they'd come *spang* through the camp and try to stampede the outfit."

"I swear, a person'd think you were ten years old." Masters did not smile in response. "Suppose he did stampede and get a hole in him—you'd feel right happy."

His handsome face showed disgust and anxiety as he raised his head to glance across at Dan.

Wheeler was staring at the savage battle-line—now about to charge. With a cold glint in his narrowed greenish eyes Masters called out—

"Picking out your scalps, Dan?"

The face that Wheeler turned to him was a grim mask, set and hard, from whose eyes a green light seemed to flare and flicker, and it did not change nor move its lips, but faced back to the front with a slow, smooth movement as if on an oiled pivot.

"I'm not worrying," Masters whispered to King. "But I'd rather be in his shoes than yours."

Then his dark brows drew in a fierce level line as he turned eyes front.

"Here they come!"

And come they did, with shrill quavering war-hoots, with a rapid drumming roll of ponies' hoofs, a wild, barbaric fluttering of vivid feathers, and the scattered crackling of rifles began before they were in range.

From the circular camp there was no answering shot until the charge came almost to easy rifle-range, when there burst the double roar of the two buffalo-guns.

One of the leading ponies plunged to a somersault, pitching his rider rolling far ahead. Another leading chief threw up his hands with a choked death-yell and pitched sidelong to the ground while his pony swept on with the rest. The charging line instantly split in the center to separate into two bands that began to sweep right and left.

"Fire!" shouted Masters, picking up his Winchester from the ground to join in the rattling crash as the whole camp cut loose.

Sweeping in two broad arcs on either side of the camp, the charging redskins had slipped each man to the far side of his pony, there to cling and let off his rifle or arrow over the pony's neck, invisible except for one arm and leg until out of range once more.

Two more Indian ponies fell, and one of the riders got to his feet in time to catch and mount the riderless horse that had carried the dead chief. The other unhorsed savage crawled into a hollow out of sight. The first charge was over.

"Cross over!" called Masters.

As all the white men passed across the open space to their places, King asked Wheeler—

"How'd you like it?"

"All right, so far," Dan answered without looking round, and lay down to sight

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his rifle. "I wish I had one of those Sharps cannon," he said, half to himself. Masters heard it and smiled a slow smile.

While the Indians were forming their line for the return charge, Dan overheard Murdock say to Masters—

"This one will settle it." And Masters nodded.

Dan naturally took that to mean that this was to be a grim and final battle to a finish—hand-to-hand. Murdock, however, had seen that the redskins were already half-discouraged, and believed that one more attempt would entirely sicken them.

King, also relieved of any serious anxiety, had got a position where he could watch young Dan in case he showed any least sign of weakening. Instead, he saw Wheeler take out his Colt, make sure it was ready for business and lay it within reach of his left hand. Then as he lay down he turned about the circle that same unseeing gaze, his face still fixed, the same evil glitter in his eyes.

"Nothing in him but fight—man-killer all the way through. No heart, no nerves, no bowels—he ain't human," King muttered solemnly. "I see where this joke turns out a flash in the pan."

The Indians' second charge certainly was a failure. While the savage line still believed itself out of range Masters said to Murdock—

"Take the buck on the pinto—now!" and both Sharps spoke at once.

The chief in the lead dropped from his horse and the pony fell an instant later.

As at an agreed-upon signal the line divided and swung widely out of range. One of the rear rank dismounted deliberately to pick up the body of the chief, before he followed the other members of the band. All the savages kept well beyond rifle-range while they scampered back to their original forming-place, coldly ignoring the presence of the camp of white men.

"They have got enough," Masters said quietly as he sat up. "They're no fools and they know these buffalo-guns will drill two ponies and then kill an Injun."

He patted the stock of his gun lovingly.

After a few minutes of dicussion at a distance the Indian band rode off slowly and sadly whence they had come. Not a single white man had been hit, and only one pack-horse was wounded badly enough to require shooting.

While the pack was being distributed the men cheerily compared notes as to their deeds and sensations. All were voluble and expansive from relief. Most of them had excuses for missing the running ponies.

DAN sat silent for some time, rifle across his lap, slowly returning his Colt to its holster. Masters tried to turn aside various flattering comments on his management of the defense by changing the subject.

"Now, Mr. Wheeler, I respectfully submit that if we are to make Forty-mile water-hole tonight, we might as well be moving."

All this time Dan had never once taken his eyes off King. He showed no sign of having heard Masters, but said slowly—

"What did you lie to me for, King?"

King had been cleaning his rifle with much unnecessary elbow-action. He now started violently and turned his head.

"Who, me? I beg — your — pardon!" With slow formality.

"Why did you lie to me?" in the same low, level tone.

Under Dan's cold gaze King changed color. He had not a cowardly fiber in him, but he afterward admitted—as have other men—that those eyes made him feel numb. His lips tightened and he spoke with an effort, deliberately:

"I lied because—" he found his throat husky and cleared his voice— "Eh-h-hm! I lied because, ——! I thought it would be a smart trick to see if you'd scare." With head up he finished frankly: "It was my fool notion of a joke, I suppose; but if it's a joke, it's on me. If anybody is scared in this bunch—right now—I—I am it!"

The frankness of the big foreman, who was known for a real he-man of courage and kindness, and his boyish confession that he was caught in mischief, went to the big hearts of these outdoor men. A grin went round the tense and listening circle as Murdock spoke for peace:

"That's talkin' man-fashion. I never saw more'n three men with sand enough to own up they were scared. And you, Wheeler, no man here but knows what kind of an Indian-fighter you are—and you got scalps to prove it. So you two boys quit your rufflin' and walkin' stiff-legged. Call it square and shake hands."

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King got to his feet willingly and stood looking at Dan, who rose slowly and swung his level eyes from King to Masters, who still stood motionless near by.

"I don't care to shake hands." He spoke low and hoarsely. Then as if he had just heard Masters' suggestion to go on, "All right—you give your orders if you're ready—I've got through."

Masters seemed to make some answer as he stood looking from King to Wheeler, but he turned away to give a few quiet directions for reforming the line of march. The whole party began to talk and bustle as they straightened out along the hot trail.

King stood for a moment, pale and rigid, before he got to work. Then he turned to help a man in trouble with his pack-horse before he took his place in line. The men, however, took every chance to show that their sympathy was with him by finding profane fault with everything he did, and he soon regained his big-voiced heartiness. He swore cheerfully at horses, mules and drivers, the sand, the heat and the Indians, the ever-receding water-hole.

But for the rest of the day young Wheeler never once opened his mouth. He rode with his eyes straight ahead, looking between his horse's ears, his lips a thin line, his eyes gleaming cold as a Winter sea.

Masters too never spoke except to give a short order, but rode in frowning silence. Now and then he turned about to direct a long look at Wheeler's flinty face, and each time faced about to ride ahead with a still more anxious frown.

When men are much together there are silences that become tacit insults, moods as dangerous as dynamite, that a glance or a gesture may jar into fatal explosion. Although Masters was young in years he was man-wise and far-seeing. He had, moreover, a deeper understanding of young Dan by reason of a common basis of feeling. He knew that Wheeler was deeply hurt and inwardly seething, and he could see chances for serious trouble. Also he saw no way to help it and it rasped his nerves to raw soreness.

King saw what might come of his own folly and was wise enough to sacrifice his pride to prevent it if possible. Once, when Wheeler had gone to the rear to fill his canteen at the water-cask, King rode forward to the head of the line.

"Say, Cinch," he began, "I know I was a fool and——"

"You're —— right!" Masters' rare profanity showed his exasperation.

"What did you expect—that a man like him would run and squeal? Fool is no name for you."

"Well, what more can I do—crawl on my knees, or let him shoot me?"

"It may come to that." Masters' horse jumped under the spur. "And a —— small loss if he did."

King turned white to his grim lips. Before he could speak Masters wheeled his horse to look squarely in his face.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. King. I didn't mean that—I was mad and it slipped out—forget it, will you?"

"'S all right. I guess you told the truth." King's smile was twisted. "I ain't nursin' any grudge; but I guess I know how Wheeler feels about shaking hands."

He rode straight back to the chuck-wagon where Dan was. Parsons and Lu Yan were within ear-shot but King spoke directly to Wheeler:

"Wheeler, I owned up, but I didn't say I was sorry. I say it now—I *am* sorry. I can't say anything more."

Still Dan's tight lips never opened, and King rode ahead to his place. Not another word was said about the practical joke for the rest of the day's journey.

FORTY-MILE water-hole was a real oasis in a real desert, a shallow bowl of greenness sunk in the sandy plain. It was not more than a hundred yards across, but deep enough so that the stunted trees about the spring in the middle could not be seen from a distance on the plain. The sun was throwing its last savage level rays into the eyes of the parched and starving caravan when the horses got the first scent of grass and water.

The leg-weary and choked animals pricked their ears and mended their pace. Even the mules lumbered to a heavy lope as their drivers croaked more vigorous abuse. Murdock's off-wheeler, an old bell-wether mule, lifted up his voice in an evensong of *hee-haw* thanksgiving when he finally stood near the shady spring, waiting with a mule's patience to be freed from his collar. Every living being broke into some form of expression of gratitude and renewed joy in life as the routine of making camp went on with snap and precision. Only Wheeler went about his work with the same settled

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gloom and grimness he had worn all afternoon.

When the four-footed beasts were made happy it was the custom for King, Parsons and Masters to sit round the small cook-fire and watch Lu Yan at his deft artistry. Tonight Wheeler came to them, his face still bleakly hard under its flouring of desert dust.

"Let's get this straight," he began abruptly. "This playing boss is no good. The man who knows how is the man to run the game, and anybody else makes a monkey of himself. I have been a joke long enough, and now I quit!"

He had turned to go to the spring for a wash-up when a snicker from Parsons stopped him. Wheeling in his tracks he fixed the tired and relaxed offender with an eye that narrowed dangerously.

"Well?"

Parsons shifted his wounded leg, now almost well, and lay back luxuriously on the sloping grassy bank as he drawled:

"Needn't freeze me with your baleful glare, you tiger-eyed demon! I am too darn tired to be scared—or anything but numb and dead sleepy. Come and eat me if you want to—I was smiling because it all do sound so da-arn foolish." And with head cocked sidewise he looked up at Dan and winked. "Come ahead. See if you can kick me up into the top of that mesquite. Bet you I land sitting up."

Wheeler's face softened as he recalled Dude's picture on the bar shelf; but he did not smile.

"Well, I am through. You can elect your chief."

"Sure. That's right—we can, and we done done it. What do you say, Lu Yan?" For Lu Yan was the Delphic referee in those days.

"I say Mr. Wheeler speaks truth—the work comes to the man who can do it."

"Ain't it the truth!" applauded Parsons, and no voice was raised in answer.

The five partners—for they insisted that Lu Yan sit in with them—ate their supper in silence. Parsons the talkative spoke only once before they rolled in their blankets. He lay lazily watching Lu Yan, who was making some preparations for breakfast. The serene Chinaman had finished and stood at the tail-board of the wagon, idly rapping the edge of one hand on his bread-board.

"There, that's the first useless motion I ever saw him make," Parsons remarked to the world at large.

Dan sat up suddenly, looked at Lu Yan's chopping movement and for the first time that day smiled his slow, grudging smile that so lighted and beautified his face.

"Hoo-ray!" Parsons crowed. "Show me that trick, Lu. That must be big medicine, that motion. How do you do it?"

He imitated the chopping on his knee.

"And that's the first sense you've spoken," said Dan. "If you knew what that means you wouldn't have landed among the bottles back of the Hoffman House bar."

"Your tenses are mixed and your stuff don't make sense. How do you make that out?"

Parsons hoped he had broken the ice at last. But Wheeler had seen King listening and now shut his lips. Within a quarter-hour the camp was asleep.

VII

FOR the rest of the trip the daily routine was not interrupted. The two parties separated at the parting of their respective ways, Murdock's going on toward the setting sun, and that of the Lazy-X swinging off to the southwest for a two days' journey alone.

There was no longer any danger of Indian raids and they were not yet within reach of Border bandits, so there was no need for posting guards at night or for keeping a tense lookout by day. As they neared the ranch all hands took to questioning King about the place, when they halted to camp.

Parsons' imagination was fired by the picture that the foreman drew, especially by the Stone House and the mystery that surrounded it. He built up its history out of his fertile fancy and never tired of speculating about its "spooks."

When the questions took the direction of signs of gold in that region, however, King had to warn Parsons in private.

"Call off your dog on the gold-signs. You'll start a stampede first thing you know, and the boys are gettin' notions already," he told him the day before they sighted the mountains that flanked the ranch. "If Ribera comes a-visitin' we need all the guns we got to stand him off. I can't tell you much about the caves in the rocks—only that all the streams from the mountains

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drop into a hole somewhere or other. Wait until we get there. Old José will show you caves till you can't sleep nights, and yarn about the River Spirit till all is blue. He claims the River Spirit took off the old Spanish miser that built the House, and he comes back when the water's high. That's all I know; so quit your naggin' about ghosts and hidden gold. We're goin' to have trouble enough even if we get there in time to save the ranch and cattle. What keeps you clackin' all the time? You'll drive us crazy."

"It's Wheeler. He gives me the creeps. If he'd stick a knife in somebody and done with it, I'd feel better—my scalp crawls under my hat every time he looks at me. What's he got stuck in his gizzard, anyhow? Can you tell me?"

"No. Try keeping your mouth shut for a change," King said gruffly.

"You being a deaf-mute yourself," said Dude sarcastically.

Then as he limped to his blankets he muttered—

"I'll bet Dan Wheeler quits us cold when we get there."

When they reached the Lazy-X near sunset of the next day after ten hours of forced march, they found that King's descriptions had fallen far short of the reality. In their rush to reach the ranch before it was looted and destroyed they had pushed on to the limit of their strength and endurance.

All day they had been struggling toward the mountains on the western horizon that always withdrew before them, until they had reached a broad grassy plain that sloped gently to the foot of a long rampart of sheer bare rock. To the northward this high wall stretched away unbroken to lose itself in the hills, but on their left it seemed to end abruptly a little way ahead.

Following a beaten path around this end of the rampart, they found themselves standing in the wide-spreading mouth of a cañon that led straight back into the western highlands. On their right the vertical cañon wall towered up to a dizzy height, continuing the long rampart whose angle they had just rounded.

"And there's the ranch—the buildings are still there, anyway."

As he spoke, King pointed upward and to the right. All eyes had been following the billowing grassy plain on which they stood, triangular in shape and reaching to the southward where it was bounded by the opposing cañon wall that spread wide apart from its fellow on the north, approaching it as it went westward to form a narrow gorge farther in front of them. Following King's pointing finger they all turned toward the north wall, and as they stared they caught their breath.

Against the high rock wall, backed by the wall itself and half as high, rose a broad terrace or table-land like a giant step. On its level surface, half-moon-shaped, was the ranch-yard and its buildings whose roofs could be seen above a strong stockade that defended half its semi-circular rim.

"It's a regular fort!" Parsons exclaimed. "We could hold that against an army; but where's the cattle—and everything?"

"Perhaps the boys have driven them to the upper corral, up top," King answered, frowning anxiously. "But the stockade gate is open—let's get the wagons up inside the yard, then we can go find out."

He rode ahead with all the wagons and horsemen following slowly up the road that slanted along the cañon wall, notched in the rock itself, at an easy grade to the gate at the stockade's end. As they climbed they looked out across a stretch of greenness and fertility that looked to them—parched from the desert—like paradise.

There was grass wherever a bit of soil, brought down from the highlands beyond, could find lodgment. Even the road, climbing along the face of the wall, was bordered with grass and bushes. Green things overhung the wall-top high above them. Far to the south were the rich colors—purples, reds and blues—of the desert.

When they stood at last in the ranch-yard they found it deserted. King went through the buildings ranged along the side near the back wall, where he found all doors open. Nobody in the barn or in the long combined bunk-house and mess-hall, and nobody in the two-story ranch-house which had been Uncle U's residence, shared by him with King. But when the foreman came out from the office he looked more hopeful.

"They haven't been gone long. Somebody has brought the mail from Tucson in the last two days," he announced. "There are two letters on the desk that reached Tucson only five days ago. The boys may

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be up top with the cattle at the upper corral, and old José must be up at the Stone House."

Looking back toward the cañon and upward as he spoke, all the men followed his example and for the first time they saw the Stone House. It stood on a smaller and higher step or terrace, commanding the ranch-yard, and like it backed by the sheer rock wall. It was the size and dignified proportions of the old mansion that was the crowning surprize of the ranch. It was well and heavily built of quarried stone and adobe—a handsome and restful mansion of the style now called "Mission"—around a spacious central courtyard.

Farther back and closer under the overhanging cañon wall than the ranch-yard, it was already in deep cool shadow, and in their hurried search of the ranch-buildings nobody had noticed this aristocrat of a past age, resting in leisurely retirement.

King was about to raise his voice to shout when a small bent figure came out through the arched doorway from the courtyard, leaning on a cane.

"Ho-la—José!" King called, and the old man waved his cane, then hobbled down the path toward them. King went to meet him.

"Glad to see you, José—you look younger than ever. Where's the boys?" he greeted the old man cordially.

"*Gracias, señor.*"

The brown face wrinkled in folds with a grin of pleasure, then came a rapid flood of Spanish that only King understood. King's face clouded as he heard. The old man seemed to be on the verge of tears as he finished. King translated, his own eyes wet.

"All gone yesterday—stampeded by a story of a gold-strike that was brought by a Mex half-breed. José thinks Ribera sent the breed. Then, last night, all the cattle were driven off—all but about a dozen. He says he didn't sleep in the Stone House last night because the River Spirit was sure to come—rain in the mountains and high water. But somebody was in the Stone House cellar—dug it all in holes. He guesses it was some of the boys gone gold-crazy, and the River Spirit took 'em off! And he feels mighty bad on account of his old chum, Uncle U," King finished dolefully. "Now I got to tell him he's dead."

At the word the old man gave a short moaning cry, put his lean hand to his breast. Then without a word he turned away to climb slowly back up the path to the Stone House.

King cleared his throat and came back to practical issues.

"Well, it might be worse. We're here before Ribera, and there's a few head of young stock on the top. Get the wagons unloaded, boys, and Lu Yan—" He looked around blankly. "Bless that Chinaman! He's got a fire going in the range already. We'll get rested and fed up and in the morning we'll hold a powwow. There's room for us in the ranch-house. We sleep in real beds—the five of us; Masters, Lu Yan, Parsons, Wheeler— Well, I'm ——!"

He finished in a blank whisper as he looked about him to count his companions, and caught sight of Wheeler.

Dan had been staring in intent silence at the Stone House ever since he had dismounted and given his horse to one of the boys. Now he was half-way up the path leading to the Stone House where old José had just disappeared.

King watched Wheeler until he in turn entered the arched door of the courtyard, then turned back to the others with a worried sigh.

"Well, it's his anyway. If he wants to stay there it's none of our business. Old José keeps it slick as a whistle. I don't guess he's afraid of ghosts or anything else."

"—— his hide!" broke out Parsons suddenly. "I hope he never shows his nose outside that door again. I hope he falls into the cañon and we can't find the pieces. Of all the sour-bellied——"

"Easy on, there!" Masters laid a hand on the shoulder of the tired and exasperated man. "You'll feel better when you're rested. Wheeler has a right to keep his mouth shut if he feels like it."

Wheeler did not appear at supper; but Parsons apologized to the others for his language after he had eaten and begun to soak in the luxury of the cool, moist air of the cañon that soothed his jangled nerves.

King paid off the cowboys according to Uncle U's promise, and, since there was no work for them, let three of them go. They started right after supper on the Tucson Trail, anxious to get where they could spend their money. Chance alone asked to stay for a few days, and King was glad to have him.

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"I'd 'a' been glad to pay 'em all if they'd 'a' stayed," he explained to Masters and Parsons as they sat on the steps after supper, "in case we need 'em to hold the fort. But we'll get along all right—clear out before we're caught—tomorrow, maybe, if we got what we——"

He stopped as Chance came round the corner of the bunk-house. When the cowboy was out of hearing King went on:

"But Chance was the last one I counted on to stay. Just shows—you can't tell by the looks of a frog."

He was looking after Chance, now climbing the path to the upper level at the wall-top where he had gone to look after the few young steers.

As Chance disappeared where the path passed behind the Stone House on its oblique upward way, King thought he saw a dark figure dart out from the rear door of the courtyard to join the cowboy. It was too dark under the wall to see clearly, however, and he was too tired to go after him even if there was a man there. If it should turn out to be Wheeler it might be awkward. He wondered if Wheeler had eaten any of the supper that Lu Yan had taken up to him.

Presently he fell asleep, and his pipe dropped from his mouth. Parsons was the next to give in to drowsiness, and only Masters was left awake to worry about things in general.

Here they were, without leadership or a definite plan, with Wheeler sulking in his tent and an attack by Border bandits in prospect. But his senses were too dull with weariness and his legs too heavy—he made a violent effort and succeeded in rousing King and Parsons.

"Chance come down?" King mumbled sleepily.

"Yes, gone to bed," said Masters.

"Ask him who— No, never mind. Do it in the morning," said the confused and sleep-muddled foreman. "Good night."

And the three went to bed, drowsily unconscious of the fatal consequences of their act.

VIII

WHEELER had followed old José up the path to the Stone House, drawn by the solid restful beauty of the old mansion. As in many a born gambler, there was in Dan a streak of the artist, a delight in the beautiful as it appeals to the eye, and he wanted to explore his property.

He wanted, moreover, to be alone. Although he was tired and tortured by thirst, the hurt of King's "joke" still rankled and he did not want to see the faces he had seen every day. He was sick of companionship and grimly savage. In that mood the grief of old José at the news of his old friend's death had somehow touched Dan to the quick, and he had followed up the path partly from an impulse of sympathy. Uncle U had been mighty good to him, too.

But when he entered the arched doorway and stood in the shady courtyard filled with the low ripple of running water, the old man had disappeared. Water bubbled in a stone basin in the center and ran away somewhere in the rock beneath. Two stone benches stood on either side of the basin; otherwise the stone floor was bare and clean.

He drank from the bubbling basin water cold and crystal clear, then went through the rooms that flanked the yard under a colonnade on each side. The first two on the right were furnished in dark heavy wood with a few gay blankets, and a fire was laid in the fireplace of the first. These rooms communicated, overlooking the ranch-yard below. All the other rooms were clean, some partly filled with ancient furniture, long unused and falling apart.

As he came out from the last room he was startled by a shadow that seemed to flit from the porch through the rear door under the cliff, and ran to look into the narrow space between the house and the cañon wall. Nothing in sight; but a pebble rattled down from the path that ran steeply up to the pass to the wall-top. He listened, ready to give chase, but there was silence filled only with the distant rush of water in the cañon.

In the rear corner of the yard he found the stairs leading downward, cut in the living rock. As he felt his way down into the cellar with a hand on the rock wall, he could hear the sound of falling water that seemed to come faint and muffled from within the rock under his hand.

There was more light at the bottom, coming through two narrow slits in the wall on his left, and it showed the spacious empty cellar walled on three sides with close stone-work. The fourth side, on the right,

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was formed by the cliff itself, but near the stair-foot was another piece of excellent masonry. Here a large hole in the cañon wall had been closed by smooth-cut stones fitted closely without mortar.

It was one of these rectangular stones, near the stairs, that Uncle U had told him would swing. With a sudden thrill of excitement he passed his hand over the lower surface.

"You will come and eat now?"

Lu Yan stood outlined on the stairs, hands in his sleeves. His soft voice had hardly startled Dan, and somehow his presence was welcome. Lu Yan never grated on his nerves, never annoyed him.

"The stones are all right," the mysterious Chinaman now informed him. "Let them stay—we can find them. Better to come and eat."

"I don't want to go down there," Dan began, mounting the stairs, nevertheless. It never occurred to him to do anything but what Lu Yan calmly advised.

"I know—I have brought food here."

Lu Yan led the way to the large room on the right of the yard where he had lighted the fire, and where the smell of broiled steak welcomed them. As Dan sat down at the table it occurred to him that now was his chance to ask the Chinaman a lot of questions about things he did not understand. But when he turned to ask him to sit down opposite him, Lu Yan had vanished from behind his chair.

In the adjoining room Dan found a fragrant bed of sweet grass, on which he felt that he had hardly closed his eyes when something made him open them again, to see Lu Yan in the dim light of early morning standing at the foot of the bed with a small stick in his hand.

"I am going to sleep here," mumbled Dan, turning over and curling up his feet which seemed to annoy him.

Lu Yan was rapping his boot-soles with the stick as he insisted—

"You must get up—your coffee is on the table."

"Quit that! I'm awake—but I just had supper." Dan sat up to rub his eyes.

"That was last evening. They want you down at the ranch-house to hold council. There are two letters to read, letters for Uncle U."

Dan got up obediently, but as he swallowed his coffee he grumbled—

"Let them open their letters—I don't want to see them."

"They are addressed to Mr. Greylock, Uncle U's letters, and you are the largest shareholder," said Lu Yan placidly.

"That's good coffee." Dan set down his cup. "I hate to— Say, what makes me such a snarling pup? Am I a freak of nature?"

He frowned up at the Chinaman who stood, hands in sleeves, watching him impersonally.

"You are a man of strong heart and your gall is bitter in your bowels," expounded the man of learning. "When such a man has an inward wound, only life or death will heal it. You will not be content until you have taken life—or saved it."

Lu Yan's lips closed. He had spoken.

Wheeler stared at him with widening pupils, trying to make sense of what he had heard; for in spite of himself he felt that it was a true saying, strange as it sounded.

"What's that to do with the letters and those fellows down there?" he asked as he got up.

"There will be trouble and much blood before sunset." Lu Yan picked up the dishes. "And you are needed to help them."

"What did you mean about finding the diamonds—last night?" Dan paused to ask. "Had you found them?"

"Not then. I know now where they are, and they are better there for the present. I searched while you slept, and later I will tell you what I found."

He started for the door with the dishes. Wheeler followed, with the muttered comment:

"He's got all the brains in this outfit. He's the man to do the bossing."

In the office of the ranch-house the three partners were waiting. Dan waited for Lu Yan to leave his dishes, insisting that the Chinaman come with him, and they entered the office together.

PARSONS acted as spokesman for the three in an attempt to get a spirit of harmony.

"Morning, Wheeler. The ghosts didn't get you, then?"

"Good morning," Dan answered shortly. "What do you want of me?"

"We have got a tough job—perhaps fighting—ahead of us, and we got to have

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a head," Parsons began clearly and logically; but under Wheeler's benumbing gaze he lost his grip. "*Any* head is better than none and— You are the largest share——"

"That'll do," Dan barked. "I don't play fool any more for you. If you fellows have got another game cooked up you'll have to work it on somebody else—I had enough!"

"Wait! Hold your horses," Masters interposed, and the quiet force of the man commanded silence. "Wheeler, you don't mean that. King has apologized for what he did—no square man can ask for more. You are too suspicious, but this is straight. We want you to take the lead, because in a tight place you think quick and do the right thing. You are the best man for the job."

"What job?" Dan whipped back at him. "How d'you know who is the man for the job when you don't know what the job is? Have you opened those letters?"

"No. And that just shows," Masters took him up as quickly, "we need some man to take quck action, to decide questions without lost time."

"Then let King open the letters and read 'em—then we'll see."

"Now she's cuttin'," Parsons applauded. "We're off!"

In a dead silence King slit one of the envelops and took out a single sheet. After glancing through it, he looked up blankly.

"My ——!" he murmured, read the sheet again and passed it to Masters. "Read it!"

Masters read aloud:

"Dear Uncle: I have finished here, and I am coming to visit you. I shall go to a girl friend in Denver first, and will write you from there.

Your loving niece,
MARION FELTON."

Absently Masters took from King and read the second letter:

"Dear Uncle: I go by the way of Fort Dixon, and should reach the ranch on the sixteenth or seventeenth. I had to fight to make them let me go, but I know I shall be safe with you. Your, etc."

Four men who had faced all forms of sudden death now looked from one to the other in a stupor of panic, fear and dismay.

Lu Yan was the first to get his voice.

"She does not write like a child."

Parsons seized one of the sheets. A college man, born in Concord, he looked at the date line and turned still paler.

"South Hadley. A college girl. My ——! Not a female human nearer than Tucson—and Ribera——"

King sat wiping the sweat from his forehead, but at the whispered name of the unspeakable chief of Border ruffians he got to his feet.

"Ribera! He's got her, by ——! This is the seventeenth—I only hope she's dead!"

"We don't know he's got her." Masters pulled himself together first. "If he hasn't, why not start out to meet her?"

"Worse than waiting here—we'd only lead 'em to her!" King was beating his fist in his hand, face twisted. "What could we do against a mob of those dirty half-breeds? They're ragged, barefoot and filthy, but they have guns and can shoot—What in —— can we do?" he finished with a whimper.

"Shoot her, if we have to," said Dan coldly. "Let's get started."

Then as he faced about he noticed Lu Yan standing motionless by the door.

"What do you say, Lu Yan?"

"This is the best place for her," said the Chinaman quietly. "If we go, we lead the bandits and Ribera to her. If we stay here, we may hold the place against them. For Ribera has spies watching us!"

"How do you know?" Masters asked in the strained silence.

"I have seen them—a ragged Mexican who talked to Chance, and Chance is another."

"I saw the Mexican. That settles it," said Masters gloomily. "We got to stay here. Another reason: we don't know which way she will come and might miss her. Isn't that right?"

He asked the question of Wheeler. Dan merely shrugged, and King saw him.

"Look here," the foreman broke out in sobbing exasperation, "are you going to keep on sulking? If you don't take hold now and do your ——est for the girl, you're a ——"

"Say it!" With ominous gentleness Dan spoke, hand on his gun. "What do you wear a gun for?"

"I wear two—to shoot with!"

It was Masters who spoke, stepping between the two bristling men, both guns drawn, wrists crossed in front of him so that each looked down a steady muzzle.

"I am sick of this—if you think I am bluffing, just try it out!"

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"And I'll back you, Cinch!" Parsons' face wore a savage snarl. He was in his most dangerous mood. "Stick 'em up, Cinch! I'll take their irons and hogtie 'em if you say so—the —— bull-heads!"

"Oh, well. I apologize—again," said King. "I'm sick, too, sick of eating crow and walking on eggs for fear of starting something. But I've got this to say. After what Uncle U done for us, if we don't get together to help this girl of his, we're a yellow bunch of whelps—all of us!"

"What do you say?" Masters asked Dan.

"Give your orders," said Wheeler. "I'll do the best I can."

Masters held his eyes for a moment, then stated briskly:

"Wheeler, you watch up top on the cañon wall. King, keep a lookout at the stockade gate. The rest of us will have horses saddled and ready to go, either way. Meanwhile we'll get things in shape to stand off an attack."

As Dan started off up the pass Parsons looked after him and shook his head.

"He is sure one hard nut to crack! You notice he never did give an inch—he made you give the orders." He was speaking to Masters.

"I know how he feels. King was to blame—he's a fool," Masters answered with heat. "If you've nothing better to do, you might help Lu Yan. Where is Chance?"

"Gone," said Lu Yan laconically. "At least, he is not to be found anywhere on the premises."

"Have you looked everywhere?"

"Yes. I looked almost all night—for Chance and—other things."

"Did you find the stuff?" Masters asked quickly.

"Yes—in a good place for it."

"Then we have just got to get ready, and wait!"

Which was the hardest possible thing to do.

Lu Yan went placidly about his duties with Parsons as his assistant and baked appetizing bread as well as cakes and pies. But Masters was worried about the diamonds. After he had seen that horses, guns and ammunition were in readiness, he came to the kitchen to question Lu Yan.

"Did you see the diamonds?" he asked abruptly.

"No, but I felt them." Lu Yan laid a twisted roll in a tin.

"Then how do you know they are not glass?"

"People do not hide glass in sealed canvas sacks."

"Why didn't you bring them to show to us?" Masters asked after some thought.

"Because they are in the safest place now, and I did not have the consent of the owners to move them."

"But—" Masters wanted a look at those stones. It was tantalizing to own valuable diamonds, within reach, and still to be denied a look at them—"has Wheeler seen them?"

"No, but he knows that I have found them."

"And he is satisfied to leave them there?"

"Yes."

Masters drew a long sigh of resignation. Excepting the girl, Marion Felton, Dan was the owner of the largest share. Already he had gone over this ground with King and Parsons, and none of them was willing to ask Wheeler for permission to inspect the stones. All of them, too, had absolute faith in Lu Yan.

"What do you think they are worth?" he asked as a final attempt.

"That depends on their soundness and color."

"Of course," Masters gave up. "I suppose there is no use asking you to show us where they are hidden?"

"Not until there is more water in the water-chimney. The stone will only swing after rain in the mountains."

"Then that is what Uncle U meant by 'more water'." Masters frowned.

"What a fool I was not to think of it. But suppose we wanted to get them in a hurry?"

"It would be necessary to wait; but it rains in the mountains almost every night—sometimes oftener."

"He's got it all figured out," Parsons put in, setting a pail of water in the sink. "I tried all that line of talk. Leave it to him!"

But waiting was such futile business that after wandering about for a time Masters was about to send Parsons to relieve Wheeler at the top of the wall, with the purpose of persuading Dan to try for the concealed jewels. It might be possible to drill and blast the wall in the Stone House cellar.

On the way to ask King if there was

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blasting-powder on the ranch, he was stopped by a shout from the lookout on the wall-top.

"Hello, Masters! Come up! Hurry!"

It came clearly echoed through the cañon, and Masters started on the run.

WHEELER had found at the top of the high wall a varied and fertile country. There was good pasturage to the west and north and many mountains on the sky-line. On the right to the northward the mountains were near, and from them two streams came tumbling down to disappear in the earth near the top of the pass where he emerged. One of these must be the stream that went down the water-chimney so near the Stone House cellar.

Facing back toward the east, a short walk brought him to the lookout where he could see far out across the desert which they had crossed. Almost below him was the ranch-yard and the Stone House. He could drop a pebble on the roof from where he stood.

The girl, Marion Felton, if she came with her escort through the mountains, must come down the valley that stretched to the northwest. It was in that direction that he must keep watch. He paced the path along the rim back and forth, scanning the valleys and hills in every direction except to the south and southwest. There all approach was cut off by the great cañon itself.

At some distance back from the wall-top he could see the upper corral with a few head of cattle grazing under the hills. He was debating whether to go so far from the lookout when he saw a man crawling away from the rim of the wall, as if he had come up the vertical face of the rock itself.

A second glance showed this impossible; it was a straight drop to nowhere. Only one stunted bush grew on a narrow shelf just over the brink—he must have been lurking there, the man, and it was Chance.

Dan ducked his head, his body already concealed by a mesquite, and poked a peep-hole in the bush.

Chance had not been watching him from the shelf; for after a look about him he stood up and came along the wall-top in his direction, keeping away from the edge so that he could not be seen from below.

Keeping the bush between them, Dan watched him steal far enough forward to peer down into the ranch-yard, then draw back and start for the open country to the westward. Dan waited until he had passed his own hiding-place before he stepped out with his Colt pointed.

"Up with your hands—quick!" Chance's hands flew up with a jerk. "Stand still—keep 'em up! Now don't stir!"

As he came near and shoved his muzzle against Chance's back he heard him growl:

"——! What d'you want?"

"Never mind—don't wiggle; for I'm nervous and I might pull too hard!"

Carefully Dan took the man's gun and belt, as well as a long knife he carried under his arm. Then he felt him over thoroughly. As he did so he found Chance's sleeve was wet, and felt the hair on his own neck bristle at the smell of blood. Not Chance's blood; as he explained afterward:

"You don't smell the blood of the man you're after, somehow, until he is dead. I don't know why, but I knew right then he had killed old José."

When he finished his search he ordered—

"Now take five steps—now you can turn around, but don't try to run."

Keeping the man covered, he asked—

"Where did you kill old José?"

"I won't tell you anything!" Sullenly. "It won't get you anything to shoot me."

"Perhaps not—but you'll tell!"

Taking a step or two backward, Wheeler hung Chance's belt and gun on a bush, then his own. Before Chance recovered enough to move Dan was on him with a panther spring.

Chance went down from the first blow on the neck. He was up and staggering toward his gun when he met an uppercut on the chin that again dropped him. He was kicked up and knocked down again until he could only crawl or roll toward the weapons that hung within a few feet. Then his arms were twisted and wrenched until he shrieked hoarsely—a jab at the base of the neck filled him with sickening pains—at length he could only gasp for breath and beg in a whisper for mercy.

He was a mulish brute, and he looked bad before he finally spat blood and panted weakly—

"I'll—tell—I'll—tell!"

"See you do, and speak up quick! You think you're hurt; but that's not a taste of what I can do."

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A thumb pressed under the ear brought a choking moan and almost collapse. When Dan thought the man could whisper, he asked—

"Where is the body?"

"In the—cave passage." Weakly.

"What did you kill him for? Quick!"

"He—wouldn't tell." Heaving fast for breath.

"Where the diamonds were? What?" Dan demanded, and Chance nodded as he panted.

"How did you get into the passage—how'd you open the stone?"

"He did—last night—I followed," came weakly a word at a time.

In the same way, with now and then an added torture to make sure the spy was telling the truth, Wheeler found that Chance had not found the diamonds. He had been hired in Chicago to shadow Uncle U as far as Gopher. Since then he had been working for himself. After stabbing old José in the dry passage, he had searched the whole passage from the cellar to the shelf at the wall-top, and had only just given up all hope of stealing the whole treasure. When Dan caught him he had been on the way to Ribera, hoping for a reward. Dan was sick of his job, but he recalled the Mexican seen by Lu Yan.

"Where did the Mexican get in—the man that came from Ribera?" he asked.

"Down below—end of stockade."

"Where is he—Ribera? Quick!"

"Don't know—Mex can't speak—English." But the furtive eyes dodged. Again Dan used his thumb under the ear.

"*A-a-a-ag!* Please! For —— sake—I tell— He's almost here—any time—now—Please!"

"Where's he coming? Speak up!"

"Please! I swear I don't know! Please! *A-a-a-a*——"

"STOP that! You brute! Stop it, I say! What are you doing to that—Oh-h-h-h!"

Dan was looking up into a beautiful face, wide-eyed with horror as it stared down at the bloody disfigured creature on the ground. It was "the girl" and she sat a tired horse. Near by sat a lone horseman in the uniform of a cavalryman. Both horses panted, caked with sweat and dust.

With his hand on Chance's neck Dan gazed dumbly. Not from surprize—he had been looking for this girl—but because she was the kind of girl to strike men dumb. She rode astride, a thing then almost unknown, in divided skirts and leggings, but she was passing fair to look upon, a feast for man-tired eyes. Chance's twitching bloody face held her with a horrid fascination.

"Oh-h you—you brute!" she almost sobbed. "You ought to be shot. What—wh-why are you torturing him?"

"Sorry you—saw it," Dan began, flushing even more than common.

"We were just——"

"*Watch* out, there!" sharply called the cavalryman.

Dan had felt the lunge Chance was making to reach the revolver near by, and was already whirling on his heel. With a casual kick that caught Chance under the ear and stretched him out, bloody face upturned, Dan quietly finished his sentence:

"—having a little exercise. You are the—Miss Felton? Excuse me."

Moving with his peculiar smooth swiftness, he stepped to the bush, swung on his belt, taking Chance's weapons as well, and cupped his hands at his mouth to shout down the gorge for Masters.

When he faced about the girl was white-lipped and fiery-eyed, breathing fast with angry disgust as she looked at him. Apparently she had appealed to her escort, for the horseman kneed his horse nearer.

"What's all this about, anyhow?" he asked, winking his off-eye.

Dan's lips were a line as he settled his belt and answered, looking only at the girl—

"Just a piece of my business, and I'll attend to it."

The girl's anger seemed to cool as she met the strange green eyes Dan held on her so steadily. But she demanded—

"What has that man done?"

"Nothing but a murder, so far," Dan answered gently in his slightly hoarse, strangely disturbing voice. "But if he gets away now, he will get all our throats cut—all but yours."

"That means, I suppose—" the girl was sarcastic—"that I shall be safe under your chivalrous protection, even from this Border bandit, Ribera?"

"It means Ribera won't get you," Dan stated, and before my lady could give thanks he added, "For we'll shoot you

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first!" And he calmly picked up and donned his hat.

"Do you work for my—for Mr. Greylock?" Marion asked coldly, but with a threat implied. "Please tell him that——"

"Follow that road down the pass," Dan interrupted. "Mr. King, his foreman, is down at the ranch-house. I'll stay with our friend, here."

He turned to give Chance an experimental poke with his boot as he spoke, and Miss Felton rode past him with rounded chin held high. The cavalryman followed, and as he passed Dan returned his formal salute and blushed, of course.

Masters came to the top of the pass, his dark eyes alight with inward pleasure. He was all alive with expectation.

"*M-m-m! M-m-m!*" said he softly. "Now, now! Did you see her?"

"I did, and she saw me. Came up behind me when I was playing with Chance, here."

"Hello!" Masters looked down with a frown at the spy who was stirring and moaning. "Where did you get that? Has he been snooping around all this time?"

"He came out of a hole behind that bush." Dan pointed to the little shelf. "That's the upper end of the hole from the cellar—there are two of 'em—and he was going to Ribera. He'll be here in a few minutes, this Ribera, and there's a way into the ranch-yard we haven't found. We are going to be busy."

"You are talkin'! Did he steal anything?"

"No, but he killed the old Mexican in the cave somewhere. What will we do with him? We don't want him around in the way."

"March him down and lock him up—we can send Parsons up here to keep watch. Come on, you!"

They got Chance on his feet, begging and complaining that he could not walk, and started in single file, Masters ahead, Chance next, Wheeler behind, keeping him covered with his revolver.

They had not taken ten steps, Chance staggering and stumbling, when the spy tripped, plunged forward, then made a cat-like leap as he reached for the Colt that swung loose at Masters' hip.

By a fiend's luck he got the handle in his hand. He whirled on Wheeler, grunting, "Got ye, —— ye!" as he fired point-blank.

Dan sprang aside and fired at the same instant. It was a sidestep draw that he had practised under Uncle U, and it served its purpose in that moment. Chance doubled up as he fell forward, the gun falling from his relaxing grip.

Masters picked up the gun, and the two stood over the dying man as he slowly raised on his elbow. Head weakly wavering, he gasped out the words—

"I'd got ye—then—'f y' hadn't slewed—like—bob-sled!"

With the last word, mouthed with a grimace of pain and forced out with a last expulsive breath, his head fell forward and Chance nestled close to the earth.

"This is no place to leave him," Masters said, thinking of the girl who might pass this way. "That was a handy move you made—you did just like you were expectin' it."

"I was hoping he'd try it," said Dan calmly. "He'd be only a danger to us, and I didn't want to shoot him like a mad dog—in cold blood. I was looking for it. But we've got no time for a funeral——"

They exchanged glances, then without another word they took the limp body up, one at the feet and the other by the shoulders. Solemnly they swung—once—twice—and let go.

Silently the body sailed over the brink and dropped from sight below the cañon's brim, one hand upstretched above the head in a grotesque wave of dumb farewell.

Far below the everlasting rush of water in the cañon went on, undisturbed by any splash.

They were half-way down the pass to the ranch-yard before Masters broke a thoughtful silence.

"They talk about last words of dyin' men. I have seen right smart o' men go out, and mostly they don't say a thing. If they do it's apt to be something you'd not expect. What made him think of that about a sled, I wonder?"

He looked up at Dan, and in the warm sympathy of a new understanding he smiled his rare slow smile into his sober face.

"That's your name, 'Sled' Wheeler—all you need to be a sure-enough Western gunman, and it fits that sidestep draw."

And Dan answered by a blush.

There were to be, in after-years, gun-fighting occasions when that difficult simultaneous sidestep and accurate shot were

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to make Sled Wheeler feared and famous on many a smoke-swept field. Some of the witnesses and narrators were destined to claim the honor of having christened so celebrated a gun-thrower by that odd name. But on the word of Sled himself it can be proved that this was the original "first time."

As the two came down to the ranch-yard, Masters called to Parsons to take the post at the head of the pass, "while we talk things over," he finished as Parsons came to meet them.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Parsons saluted cheerily and hobbled past, happy in the sight of Wheeler once more on the job. And as he climbed, he murmured—

"Achilles is out of his tent at last!"

It was well he did not have a vision of what was waiting for him at the end of his rocky path—just like folks anywhere.

"Where's King?" Dan suddenly asked as they crossed the yard. "There is nobody at the gate—and Chance says there's a hole around the end of the stockade."

"Probably King has had to tell *her* that her uncle is dead." Masters tried to heal the breach for good and all. "King has had a hard time. Can't you forget his fool joke?"

"I don't intend King to forget it," Dan said shortly.

IN THE ranch-house sitting-room they found Lu Yan had set a table for the cavalryman and the girl. One plate was untouched, and the soldier had fallen asleep, head on his arms on the table, half-eaten food beside him.

King sat with his head in his hands, near by, and Lu Yan came from the stairway as Masters entered with Dan. Both must have heard what Masters had said outside; for Lu Yan spoke first:

"Mr. King has told Miss Felton. She is asleep up-stairs. They rode all last night and they are tired. Corporal Holt made me promise to wake him when you came." And he shook the arm of the sleeping man.

When he raised his head, Holt drank his coffee, asked for a wet towel and when he had got himself awake he told his story clearly.

"The colonel sent me with three men because I know this country—I worked here once. Last night a big Mexican in a red sash rode into our camp—no, that was night before last—with a story about being lost on his way to Tucson. He was a spy from Ribera's headquarters, for he sneaked out in the night. I almost caught him at it, but he got away. You know what it means if Ribera gets hold of a white girl! I woke up the camp and told the three men to keep on down the valley trail while I struck off through the mountains with Miss Felton for this ranch. This was the nearest place of safety, and I hoped Ribera would follow the trail of the other three. Miss Felton and I rode up the bed of a stream half a mile before we made a line for here. I thought she'd be safe here."

The man was so tired and sleepy that he wavered on his feet.

"A good piece of work," said Masters. "Why don't you sit down?"

"I'll go to sleep if I do, and I've got to go for help—right off!"

It was a man's task he was proposing, and all the men felt the iron fiber of the soldier.

"You think we couldn't get through—all of us—to the Fort?" asked Dan.

"No, sir! Don't try it, for —— sake! You're surrounded; the hills are full of Ribera's men—I saw 'em from a tree on the mountain not three hours ago—and they'll be here inside an hour. Your only chance is to hold 'em off here until I can bring relief."

"How will you get through?"

"Afoot—as a bandit. Then I'll steal a horse. I can make it if I start now. Can you give me any old clothes and a broad Mex sombrero?"

"Good man," said Dan. "I wish I could go with you!"

"Thank you, sir; wish you could."

The soldier saluted, then turned to follow Lu Yan who beckoned him to the bunkhouse to change his clothes.

Dan was still looking after the cavalryman, still wishing he could start out with Holt and picturing the adventure ahead of him, when he saw Lu Yan come back and start for the stairway, saying to him—

"Miss Felton wants to speak to you."

Before he could get wits to run away the girl came into the room, still more lovely with her bronze hair tousled and eyes soft from sleep.

"I made Lu Yan promise—I wanted to ask your pardon, Mr. Wheeler." She came

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straight to Dan and offered a small warm hand. "I did not understand. Mr. King has told me the splendid things you have done, and I know so brave a man can't be mean or spiteful. So you will forgive me for being a beast, and let me thank you."

At the firm pressure of her hand Wheeler choked and stammered—

"I didn't—I came along with the bunch—Masters here did—he did all the doing."

She smiled in a way that made him dizzy as she said:

"I know, all men are liars and hate to be thanked. I knew you wouldn't like it, but I had to try. And I had to tell you all one more thing," she spoke to them all with sweet frankness. "I know I have made it hard for you, that you are all in danger of your lives on my account; but I will do just what you tell me without question. And if the worst comes—" with large brown eyes on Dan's—"I will just hold you to your promise and take it thankfully. I know I couldn't be in better hands."

Her rich low voice was vibrant with deep feeling. Without a trace of feminine coquetry she added—

"I can take orders like a man, so tell me what to do!"

"First," Dan swallowed hard, "you might say good-by to Holt—he is starting for the Fort to get help—and then get some sleep."

Holt came in just then, looking like a ragged and barefoot Mexican, and Marion went to him with both hands out.

"Thank Colonel Emmons for me—for sending me in the care of such a soldier and a gentleman. Don't forget the words, for that is what you have been—every minute. Will you?"

"No 'm! I—won't forget," mumbled Holt, eyes on the floor.

"Neither shall I. Good-by and good luck!"

With a quick pressure she released his hands, and Holt ducked through the door and was gone.

"Now I'll obey orders." And without a sign of self-consciousness she swung from the room and up the stairs.

"Do they raise 'em like that in New England?" asked the Southerner, Masters softly, after a silence.

"Sometimes—when the signs are right," said King reverently. Then he jumped up with a start. "By the ——! I forgot the gate!" and ran out, Winchester in hand.

Wheeler looked after him with curling lip.

"The —— fool!" he muttered. "All this time no guard at the gate." Masters said nothing, for he had hoped the feud was over. Both he and Wheeler saw to their rifles and revolvers in silence, cleaning them and replacing the empty shells. The sun was broiling hot and heat-waves danced and shimmered outside the open door.

No other sound than the distant rush of the river in the cañon broke the peaceful stillness. Lu Yan carried a porous jar of cold water up-stairs for Marion and came down to report.

"She says she will sleep the better if she hears some man below. If there is a gun to spare—or two guns—I think I will go to the Stone House cellar and make sure all is well. There has been rain in the mountains and I think the stone will swing."

"Uncle U's guns are in my war-bag," said Dan.

After Lu Yan had taken them and gone to the Stone House Dan stood in the door looking up at the mountains and the wall-top.

"He is right, as usual. That man is a wonder." He turned to Masters. "You don't suppose that Holt was mistaken and that Ribera is not coming after all?"

Masters shook his head.

"I hope so, but I don't believe it."

"And that fool, King—do you think he knows about any cave or hole in the wall around the end of the stockade?"

"He says not."

"If he makes a fluke and gets us caught—" Dan was growling, when he suddenly called, "Parsons is waving to us," and stepped outside the door to look up at the top of the wall.

Masters was at his side in a second and saw Parsons signaling with his hands to them. Masters cupped his hand behind his ear, and Parsons shouted:

"Coming! Look out for the Stone House! The hole in the wall!"

"He means somebody coming down the cave passage," Dan said hurriedly. "You stay here, and I'll go tell Lu Yan."

Dan was off up the path to the Stone House on the run, and Masters stood looking up at Parsons. Dude saw Dan's movement and nodded. Then, just as Parsons turned back to the path, there was a sharp crack of a rifle.

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Parsons stood for an instant, then pitched stiffly forward on his face and lay motionless.

Masters took a quick look all about him, then ran round the corner of the house to call King. His first thought was to post King where he could watch both the gate and the ranch-house, while he went up the pass to repel any attack from above.

But King was not at the gate, and the gate was open!

Masters took two steps toward the gate before he thought of the girl, alone and unguarded up-stairs in the ranch-house, then ran back. He saw the back door of the ranch-house standing open, rushed through it and dropped senseless inside from a blow of a rifle-butt.

When he came to consciousness with a splitting headache, he was tied hand and foot and lying on the floor of the ranch-house sitting-room. Near by lay King, also tied and with a bloody head. At each door, front and rear, were two guards, dirty and barefoot, with high-pointed broad-brimmed hats, who muttered only in hoarse whispers. Outside a larger darker Mexican with brutal heavy face and a red sash about his waist paced back and forth and grunted at them whenever one made a sound above a murmur.

Masters managed to roll to the wall where he could sit up and see into the yard, and presently King opened his eyes and worked himself alongside. The guards only scowled and muttered to one another, so King whispered—

"They haven't found her?"

"I don't know. Where did they get in?"

"Must be a hole in the bunk-house cellar—they got me from behind. What are they waiting for?"

"How do I know? We're done for unless Wheeler and Lu Yan can do something."

One of the half-breeds growled an oath that meant silence. After waiting until the Mexicans were absorbed in rolling cigarets, King whispered again—

"How about Parsons?"

"They shot him, and the shot was a signal—it all happened at once. Probably they have got Wheeler and Lu Yan tied up or killed." Masters moved nearer to whisper low, "She has got a gun—if they start up-stairs we've got to yell together—wake her and tell her to shoot."

"This is ——! I wish they had shot me!" King's head dropped on his chest and his eyes closed.

Still there was only subdued whispering from the bandit guards, who kept under cover, waiting for something. It was plain that these ragamuffins were kept in a state of subjection.

IX

SUDDENLY the whispering became excited and explosive. Every dirty Mexican seemed to try to hide himself, and the guards put out their cigarets to draw within the doorway and stand, one on each side, with gun at awkward present arms.

The man in the red sash came hurriedly into the room, took a scowling glance of inspection, swore at the guards and went out again. Immediately he came back, walking backward and bowing every three steps to the great presence whom he ushered in.

"Enter Don Tomaso di Teruel Ribera!" he announced with absurd pomposity, his heraldic address apparently directed to the chief himself, and the personage fitted his introduction.

Framed in the doorway, he made a gorgeous picture. Wearing a long cloak, despite the heat, which he threw back to show his figure and its ornaments, he was a riot of color. His bolero jacket was red velvet, his short breeches of a lighter shade, his sash was yellow and his stockings white. One hand rested on the hilt of a sword, the other on the ivory butt of a revolver and his hat was rich with gold filigree. He was worth looking at even for his clothes and he was a fine figure of a man in any clothes.

His face was thick-lipped and heavy, but absurd in its arrogance and self-consciousness, fiercely sensual and cruel, yet with eyes that gleamed with cunning perception.

After a haughty look about him at which the guards actually shivered, he said to his red-sashed lieutenant in fair English:

"You have done well, Pedro. Bring in the gringo Wheeler."

Masters and King exchanged quick glances, then watched the door eagerly. Pedro beckoned from the doorway, and Wheeler came in, followed by a lean, rat-faced Mexican who held a revolver at Wheeler's back. They noted that Dan had been disarmed, his gun resting in a black sash which the lean Mexican behind him

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wore as a mark of rank. When the great Ribera faced him, Dan bowed low and gracefully, and the chief looked less fiery.

"You have tell me, Meester Wheeler, that these men can tell me not'ing about the di'mo-onds—more than you can tell."

Dan bowed and answered—

"Yes, your Excellency."

"Is that troo—you men? Eef you can tell me more, it may do you moch good. Ribera will pay those who 'elp him." He frowned impatiently. "Speak!"

"No!" King shook his head.

"They don't know as much as I do," Dan put in, and then to Masters, "Isn't that so?"

Masters nodded, trying to read Dan's face.

"You see," Dan turned to the chief, "I can do all I promised."

"Then we do not want them." Ribera waved his hand. "Pedro and Manuel——"

He spoke rapidly in Spanish while Pedro's brutal face grew more brutally pleased.

"Pardon, Excellency," Dan interposed. "We shall need them later—to amuse the men as you said—and if I get the young lady for you, it will be easier if these men are not touched until afterward."

"Yes? But the *señorita*—" kissing his hand to the ceiling with an ecstatic leer—"you are su-ure you can dee-liverre her unharm?"

"Yes, I can handle her all right; but she has got a gun, and if she sees or hears anything rough, she will use it—on herself!"

Masters was looking at Dan as if to bore him to the soul with his eyes. King had been trying to catch Dan's eye, or get a hint of what he hoped to do, and now broke out:

"Wheeler! Are you going to sell that girl to save your dirty hide?"

"Sure I will! You ——! This is where I get square with you," snarled Wheeler, and he slapped King's mouth heavily. "You ——!"

"Marion! Marion Felton!" King roared. "Hang on to your gun! Shoot——"

Dan's hand was over his mouth. Ribera gave a quick order and there was a scuffle while Pedro and Manuel got King and Masters gagged. Both were kicked and bruised in the process. Ribera stood looking on with contemptuous satisfaction.

"What did I tell you?" Dan panted, appealing to the chief. "That's the man that has insulted me—and this is my chance!"

"I see you have tell the truth. You shall be re-ward, eef you keep your promise. What do you wish—about these two gringo?"

"If you want the girl delivered up at the Stone House, keep these two out of sight somewhere. Then, after you have got everything ready up there, get all your men out of sight so I can take her up there without any fuss," said Dan coolly.

"Everything is pree-pare for our refreshment at the Stone House, is it not, Pedro?"

Pedro bowed low and assented. Ribera turned to Dan.

"Your plan is ver' good. I will await the *señorita* in the Stone House—you will bring her to me there, and I will enter-tain her for the night. Not a per-son will dees-turb me, on-til I call—onlee Señor Wheeler and the Chinese. Onder-stand, Pedro?"

And the chief gave rapid orders in Spanish to his two lieutenants. Before leaving, however, he warned Dan.

"Ree-member! You will be cov-err by a 'on-dred guns—and make not the attempt to es-cape with the *señorita!*"

"I am no fool," said Dan dryly.

"I believe you, frien' Wheeler—I will make your for-tune, still!"

Masters and King were dragged out of the door and round the corner of the bunk-house. King got himself kicked senseless in the process by trying to wake the girl up-stairs by banging his feet on the floor.

Masters, however, still had a hope that something might be done if Wheeler could get hold of a weapon—perhaps Marion did have a gun, and Dan would fight it out up-stairs in the ranch-house. When Masters had been thrown down with King on the western side of the long building, he could see a horde of ragged bandits huddled behind the bunk-house, almost a hundred of the animals, and his hopes died.

Still he could not believe that Wheeler was such a foul cur as to deliver the girl—he groaned and shut his eyes, trying not to think. He saw Ribera stalk slowly up the path and enter the Stone House.

For a time there was silence in the yard, broken only by a whispering growl or snicker from the noisome mob in hiding. Masters lay staring at the Stone House path, hoping that the girl would never go up it. Hadn't Dan promised to shoot her before he would

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let her fall into the hands of this fiend? As one minute dragged after another Masters told himself Dan would keep his promise—of course he would—he never broke his given word.

BUT at length two figures walked up the path—a long look to make sure—Masters groaned aloud in his misery. It was she, and on Wheeler's arm!

He watched them disappear within—watched the entrance for a long time—until Ribera appeared in the door to wave a hand in an exultant signal.

Then the mob poured out, overran the ranch with shouts and empty laughter as they made ready to feast and plunder.

Masters rolled over, turning his back on the sickening sight—and for the first time was conscious that the broiling sun was burning him to a cinder.

The ranch-yard became as busy as an ant-hill; but not without some restraint on the beastly abandon of the bandits. Pedro and Manuel, the two Ribera officers, stationed guards above and below, kept the rabble away from the Stone House where the monarch lay, and supervised the doling-out of food and liquors. A steer was brought down from the corral and a pit dug for a barbecue at nightfall.

Masters and King, meanwhile, grilled in the fierce sunlight. Any attempt to roll into the shade of the building got them only kicks and blows. There is a limit to man's endurance and his capacity for pain, and King's battered head, bare to the merciless rays, was first to succumb. He began to struggle against his bonds, to mumble his gag. Masters, curled up to get his own head in the shelter of his body, at length succeeded in rolling into a position where he could shade King's wounded scalp. Almost immediately the foreman's delirium subsided and his struggles ceased; but Masters could not long stand the sun on his own bare head. Both men were panting like spent hounds, their mouths half-filled by their cracked and swollen tongues.

Yet not a quarter-hour passed that Masters did not face the white-hot rays to stare long and hard at the Stone House, looking for he knew not what, but with still surviving hope. At times he could see nothing but circles of white and crimson that throbbed and spread like ripple-whorls on water, beating in unison with the pains that racked his splitting skull. He hardly felt the occasional kicks and blows that his movements brought upon him. The sun was slowly lowering—some time the shadow of the cañon wall would reach them if they were still alive. The burning hours dragged on and on.

After one long blurred stare at the Stone House entrance he thought Lu Yan stood in the arched doorway. The old mansion was now in the dark shade, and Masters had to wink his parched eyes and wait—Yes, Lu Yan was there and signaling to the man on guard just below him.

Lu Yan seemed to give a message to the Mexican, pointing to the two bound men in the yard below, and Masters' laboring heart skipped a beat. The Mexican was stupid, but at length he came back to his post and shouted to another guard, who summoned Pedro from the bunk-house. Pedro came out, bottle in hand, and went part-way to receive the message. He came back swearing, barked an order and went back to his companions.

The guard on the path was relieved and came down the path on the run. Before he went inside for his liquor, however, he sullenly brought a pail from the bunk-house to set it down near the tortured captives. Grumbling curses, he roughly cut the rags with which they were gagged and hurried off to get drunk.

Slowly and fearfully Masters hitched along toward the pail, raised his head above the brim. It was two-thirds full of water.

For a time Masters could only lie on his back and pant, giving thanks for Lu Yan to the Power that had created Chinamen. He did not do it in due form, but he did it.

It had been only a few hours, but both men had been baked to a crisp and both had lost blood. Neither had even a hat to shield the head. He knew he must control himself, and feared that he might spill the precious liquid.

He first wet his swollen mouth, spitting out small mouthfuls to wash away the filth and sand, and rested while he counted a hundred. Next, he took one swallow, pulled himself off and counted again.

King was babbling in his tortured stupor. And now Masters could trust himself to take water in his mouth and hold it a moment. He began spraying King's head and

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face, spurting the water like a Chinese laundryman, until at length the swollen eyelids opened wide and the red eyes beneath showed signs of understanding. By the same slow process King was revived. There came a time when both had taken a long, sweet drink, and lay relaxed, relishing the ecstasy of comfort that spread gently through their shriveled veins.

Carefully hoarding their supply, they sprayed each other at intervals while they watched the creeping approach of the shadow of the tall cliff. When at length it reached them and enfolded them in its blessed coolness they dropped into dreamless sleep.

"Wake op, gringo pigs! Look op at Ribera, the chief!"

Pedro was kicking them awake. He was drunk and drinking, but proud of the glorious Ribera. Moreover, he enjoyed torture. He kicked some more.

"No gringo pig can stand before the great Ribera. No woman can say 'No' to the chief— Look w'ere he walk with hees mees-tress!"

Masters stared into the deep shade under the wall, for the sun was low and the air cool. On the terrace outside the Stone House walked the cloaked figure of Ribera—and on his arm, leaning on him with no sign of compulsion, walked Marion Felton.

There was no mistake. There was still light enough to make out the fresh color of her skin. She walked with a free, graceful stride and threw back her rich hair with a movement of pride and pleasure.

Masters groaned and avoided King's eyes, still staring.

"Ho! I shall have her next," Pedro exulted thickly. "You—pigs—shall see me. And tomorrow—you pigs—" he spat as he kicked—"he has prom-mees that we *geeve you to the ants*," emphasizing with a last kick. "Theenk ohf that—an' be 'appy!"

And he reeled away, shouting for liquor.

The bound men never took their eyes from the promenading pair on the terrace until they disappeared within, the figure of Ribera turning to wave a good-night farewell. It was greeted by a hoarse burst of cheers from the carousing mob below—and by a mixed chorus of obscenity and silly laughter. Man is the only animal that laughs—score one for the "lower" animals.

The two lay with faces turned away from each other in silence, until King asked—

"D'you hear what he said—about the ants?"

"Yes. But I have not seen any 'man-eaters' down here."

"They are here—I've seen 'em." And King rolled his head dumbly.

Both men had heard of this rare Mexican sport—giving a man to the ants. It is simple.

You bind the victim—as these men were already bound—and bury him to the neck in an ant-hill. You want a special kind of ant—his jaws are sharp, strong forceps, and with them he tears living flesh, any tissue he comes to—eyes or nerves for instance. Bit by little bit he tears the flesh—and other things—away until he leaves the polished bones. It is said they even clean out the marrow.

The skeleton is left beautifully clean; but there are earlier stages in their minute surgery—stages not so pleasant to dwell upon—when a living, flopping head protrudes from the sand, all covered and acrawl with the struggling, tearing insects that fill mouth, nose, eyes— To picture this sport as applied to oneself is not a pastime for a person of lively fancy....

Well, it's your own fault—you *would* stop to think about it!...

And this was what the two captives had to think about as a prospect for the next day.

X

RIBERA strode up the path to the Stone House, troubled by no doubts. Wheeler would bring the beautiful girl to him or be thoroughly shot by his trusty riflemen. This Wheeler was no fool. He had seen where his interest lay, and he had been insulted by his companions. Ribera was something of a face-reader, and he flattered himself he had added to his staff a fearless and merciless gringo who would be a useful tool if properly paid and properly impressed.

And he must have been awe-stricken, this gringo Wheeler, to see the great Ribera appear from nowhere. Ribera reviewed with relish his dramatic appearance—stepping out of the cellar entrance before the captive Wheeler. Even his own men who had stolen down the pass to hold up Wheeler and the Chinaman in the courtyard had been dumb with fear when he had risen up before them out of the earth. It had been

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easy to mold the gringo to his imperious will—nobody could resist the great Ribera, the man who could pass at will through solid rock and appear like a spirit where he chose.

Dramatic display was the breath of his nostrils, and he half-believed in his own superhuman powers. Here was new proof of it.

And he would spend the night in the Stone House as his palace with only his subjugated enemies to wait upon him. He alone knew all its secrets—his alone was all power and knowledge. He was drunk with self-conceit.

Everything was prepared for his enjoyment, food and drink waited in the large East Room, guards were posted on all sides. Now he awaited the *señorita*, attended only by the swift-footed Chinaman who stood bowing in the courtyard. While he waited for Wheeler and the girl he turned to Lu Yan haughtily.

"You have serve the nobeel-ity?"

"I hope to prove that I know how the noble should be served. Your Excellency shall be served as he deserves." Lu Yan bowed placidly.

"You shall do well—and be well ree-ward. Be quick and ver' silent!"

"Yes, your Highness."

Wheeler was coming with the girl on his arm. Ribera took his favorite pose just within the entrance, fingering the hilt of his ornamental sword, cloak thrown back to show his figure to advantage.

As the pair came closer his coarse face lighted with pleasure, became thicker with desire as he gloated over the girl's fresh beauty. Pedro had not lied, and even Wheeler might earn a reward if he was duly obedient and ministered to his pleasure.

"Well-come, *señorita!* Enter and fear not."

Bowing with a sweep of the heavy hat, he stepped aside and struck a pose as he used his deepest chest-notes—

"Ribera is ter-ree-ble to hees ence-mies—but *ver'* kee-ind to those he lo-oafes!"

Waving Wheeler aside as he stepped through the door, Ribera took the girl's hand in his and led her to the room prepared on the right of the courtyard, overlooking the ranch below. When he had handed her in with another bow, saying, "Fear not, leetle rose," he strode back to the entrance and stepped outside to wave his exultant signal to his people that the revelry might begin. It was a great moment for Ribera.

He did not note that Lu Yan and Wheeler exchanged darting glances behind his back—were they not unarmed and surrounded? Fairly blind with conceit and lustful desire, he hurried back to the East Room. He gave not even a glance to his new servants on each side of the entrance, but as he passed Lu Yan he dropped on his face without a sound.

With one lightning slicing chop of the hardened edge of his hand, taking Ribera across the back of his brown neck, Lu Yan felled him like a pole-axed steer.

Meanwhile Wheeler pulled and pushed the heavy door, creaking on its rusty hinges, until it closed the doorway all but a crack.

"I didn't believe the fool would fall for it!" was his comment as he helped Lu Yan drag the gorgeously clothed man into a small room on the western side of the courtyard.

Marion was watching from across the yard, holding her half-closed door in one trembling hand. Now she closed the door and ran to the couch inside, covering her ears with her hands.

Presently the solitude became unbearable, and she looked from the window, only to shrink back with a moan from the sight below. At that instant Pedro was refreshing himself by kicking the captives into the full glare of the sun. After a time she opened the door into the courtyard for companionship.

Lu Yan was washing his hands at the fountain-basin, and he came at once.

"You are safe—do not be afraid," he said. "Perhaps you had better take this."

He offered one of Uncle U's guns which he had hidden before the capture and now had under his shirt.

"No. I still have the one I had down there." She showed the weapon.

"What have you—where is——"

"The great Ribera will trouble you no more," said Lu Yan gently. "You can sleep in perfect safety—there is a bed in that next room."

"I don't want to be alone—must I?"

"Not if you do not wish it. Mr. Wheeler is to play the part of Ribera for a time, so do not be afraid. I call him." And he beckoned at the door.

"Oh-h-h!" Marion drew back, pallid with fright, as Ribera came from the dark doorway opposite.

"It is Wheeler," repeated Lu Yan.

"Think I'll pass in the dark?" asked the figure in Ribera's clothes.

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As Dan came out into the light he imitated Ribera's pompous stride.

"The great Ribera is ter-ree-ble to hees enee-mies," he growled. "How d'you like it?"

"Ah-h!" Marion, hand at breast, let out her breath in a half-sob, half-laugh of hysterical relief. "I thought—you— You are—a sight!" And she was ready to cry and laugh together, but Dan brought her to herself by a lucky chance.

"Careful," he warned. "There's a guard just outside. We have got to make them think Ribera is in here with you—until dark anyway—then I can pass at a distance. Meanwhile Lu Yan has got to carry all orders and messages back and forth."

"Then come in here, quick! They might see you through the door—it isn't closed." She took Dan, flushing under his improvised stain, and drew him by his arm into the cool room. "I was telling Lu Yan I couldn't stay alone. Shall I close this door?"

"No—they can't see in here. Ribera left orders nobody was to en-terr. And we're supposed to eat, and—enjoy ourselves!"

Dan was struggling with his cloak and his blushes, trying to be entertaining and at ease.

"I will do anything you tell me to—anything at all that will help. I suppose we must rattle the dishes." She turned to the table. "Don't you want to eat? I—I do," she finished bravely.

"You're a gentleman," said Dan emphatically. "Eat? Watch me!"

Then, as he helped her to the cold meat Lu Yan had fixed daintily, he turned to the Chinaman.

"Better pop a cork, and then sit down yourself."

LU YAN, however, insisted that he must watch the entrance while they ate, in case any of the bandits came for orders. It was Marion who was the first to remember the sufferings of Masters and King, and it was she who suggested that their gags might be removed so that they might drink water.

"We'll try it," Dan decided at once. "It will be a show-down. Anyway we can find out if this is going to work."

So he had Lu Yan take the order to the guard outside. When they, looking out through the window that gave on the ranch-yard below, saw that the order was carried out and the suffering of the two captives relieved, both the girl and Dan felt more easy in their minds.

"They won't suffer such a lot if they have water, will they?" she asked anxiously.

"No. They're going to sleep now," said Dan. "And now we know we can make it work. Perhaps we can keep these animals satisfied for a while—until morning, anyhow." With a half-smile he added, "Unless they insist on looking me over, to make sure I am Ribera."

"They will not dare to do that—they are afraid of Ribera," Lu Yan said positively.

"Well, the next thing is the passage from the cellar," said Dan as he got up from the table. "Can we get up to the wall-top if we want to?"

"Not until there is more water coming down the chimney," Lu Yan said promptly. "I have just tried it. Moreover, they have a guard posted at the top to watch their horses. That is one thing they do well—keep guards on all sides."

"If we could only get those two men in here," Marion said hopefully, "we might get away in the night—couldn't we?"

"It's a big IF," Dan said reluctantly. "The animals down there will watch 'em close—they have the promise of being allowed to torture them tomorrow."

"Couldn't you issue orders—as Ribera—that they be locked in here for the night? We must do something!"

Dan discussed the plan with Lu Yan, but decided, for Marion's sake, that they must take no chances of rousing suspicion.

The moment that the bandits discovered that their chief was dead—or even suspected it—their lives would not be worth a penny, and the fate of the girl was something not to be thought of.

"We have got to keep them fooled as long as we can. It's our only chance!" was Dan's decision as announced. And for the same reasons they hesitated about trying to order that Masters and King should be fed, or put in comfortable confinement.

"Go out and see if the guard out there will talk," Dan finally told Lu Yan. "He can understand English, for he's been listening, and maybe you can find out what the dirty dogs are thinking."

Lu Yan was willing, and made the attempt. The guard appeared to talk to the

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Chinaman. More, he summoned Manuel from below and Lu Yan came back after a long parley, looking worried.

"They are meanly suspicious by nature," he stated. "And they know that there is valuable booty somewhere on the premises. This Manuel has more brains than any of them—even Ribera—and I think he suspects the passage in the rock. He said that King and Masters have been talking in delirium, and he surely has overheard something that has made him to think. He asked me why the chief did not show himself outside this room."

"*Sh-h-h!* He's listening under the window now," whispered Dan. "We must be mighty careful not to let him see me."

"After it is dark, I think it would be well to let them all see you," was Lu Yan's idea. "Choose a time when Manuel is below—the others will not know you, in the firelight from below."

"That's right—we'll do it," Dan said grimly. "Oh, how I do love these dirty greasers! If it were not for——"

He gritted his teeth and checked himself with a quick look toward the couch where Marion had fallen asleep from weariness and strain. She was well worth any suffering or effort. For her a man could even be patient and do nothing when his every fiber called for fight and blood.

WHEELER was not the sort of man to fall in love with every attractive woman, but he was too intensely virile to be indifferent, and this girl possessed a rich charm that was getting into his very blood. It came over him in waves that made him dizzy and muddled his wits.

He sent Lu Yan to the cellar to make sure that it was still impossible to get into the secret passage, while he stayed to guard the girl and to get his thoughts straight.

"Don't stay! And keep an ear cocked for anybody that comes for orders," he charged the Chinaman.

As soon as Lu Yan was out of sight he began to be uneasy. If Manuel, the keen-eyed and suspicious, should come for orders, and if he should dare to push his way into the courtyard, he would see that this was not his chief in Ribera's clothes. Dan cocked and examined the chief's ivory-handled revolvers at his belt. They were good weapons; but it would make little difference whether they were used first on Manuel or on the sleeping girl. There would be an alarm in either case, and it would be his duty to shoot Marion when he could no longer hold off the mob of beasts.

The thought of those beasts turned loose and of Marion in their filthy hands brought cold sweat to his forehead and his palms. And to think that if she could only escape, every pleasure that wealth could buy would be hers! She was made for refined pleasures and for a wholesome home-life—and now it was only a question whether she must be shot now or the next day. There was nothing he could do to save her, no reasonable hope that he could keep her safe for another twenty-four hours, and no hope of a rescue from the Fort within three days.

He was beginning to realize the desperate fix they were in, and the result was that his thoughts began to race madly, like a squirrel in a whirling cage—and with as much effect. The one slight straw to which he clung was the thought of the passage in the rock. If they could get in that long cave, with plenty of shells, one man at each end could hold it as a last resort—until they were smoked out, or one man killed.

The diamonds! He thought of them with grim disgust. No doubt they were in the safest place for them, and Lu Yan could lay hands on them whenever the stone would swing; but of what use were they if they could not escape? To attempt a bargain with the bandits would be worse than folly—they would take the stones and then break their promise.

He was holding himself still by sheer muscular cramp when Lu Yan came back.

"Don't do that again," was his first speech. "I was almost in a fit."

"The stone will not swing now, but there will be rain in the mountains tonight," Lu Yan announced. "I think it is almost time to show yourself——"

There was a soft knock at the entrance dooor out in the courtyard.

Lu Yan went to the outer door and returned to report:

"It is Manuel. He insists that he must see the chief with his eyes. I told him the chief was asleep."

"Did you tell him I—the chief would skin him if he was disturbed?"

"Yes, but he answered that he would not disturb him. He would only *see* him sleeping, and go away."

"All right, wait a minute, then bring him

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in. I'll lie down on the bed in the next room, and you can bring him to the door. Got your little strangle-rope all ready?"

From under his frock Lu Yan showed a silken cord, gray and smoothly coiled like a small snake, and put it back again.

"All right, then. Be sure he doesn't holler if he looks too suspicious—or if he tries to wake me."

Lu Yan nodded, and Dan went into the adjoining room. He stretched out on his side, back to the door, and Lu Yan ushered the lean Mexican into the outer room.

Manuel stole a quick look all about the room, gave the sleeping girl a furtive leer, then from the doorway gazed at the figure on the bed in the shadowy room. For a moment he seemed about to speak, but fear of Ribera's anger prevailed, and he stole a-tiptoe from the room.

"He give orders—for tonight?" he whispered sullenly, outside.

"The same guards—as usual—and the two men to be given water and food. If they are to be used tomorrow, they must not die tonight. See that they are not harmed."

Lu Yan repeated his lesson as if by heart. Manuel went slowly out of the courtyard.

He was seen in parley with Pedro by the barbecue fire below, and there seemed to be an argument.

"I think you must walk outside—to quiet them," said Lu Yan. "It is dark enough, and the fire blinds their eyes."

And thus it came about that the parade outside was staged for the benefit of the suspicious Mexicans—this same promenade of Marion on Dan's arm that caused King and Masters such mental anguish as seen from the yard below.

"That ought to hold them for a while," was Dan's comment.

And apparently the suspicions of the two officers were laid aside for the night. The inmates of the Stone House were not again disturbed.

No chance for a rescue was offered, however. The yard was brightly lighted by bonfires as well as the pass and the wall, while double guards were set and relieved at regular intervals.

Marion was prevailed upon to sleep, toward morning, in the bedroom off the East Room. Dan and Lu Yan kept watch each by turns while the other lay on the couch in the big room in front.

XI

"WAKE up! It's too bad; but Lu Yan thinks you'd better come."

Marion was shaking his shoulder, and Dan sprang to his feet, shivering. It was still cool in the room although the sun was coming level through the eastern window.

"There's hot coffee on the table, and your gun is at your feet." The girl was looking at him with kind protective eyes in which there was a glint of amusement. "You'd look quite handsome in those clothes if you'd wash your face—it's all streaked. Here."

She offered him a wet towel, and as he wiped off Lu Yan's make-up she poured his coffee. He drank it while she talked in a low tone.

"There has been rain in the hills and Lu Yan says the passage is open; but the guards are still at the top. He has carried food and things into the passage, in case we have to go there."

"What is he doing now?" asked Dan. She looked more lovely than ever as she looked after all his wants. "Perhaps I ought not to have wiped that stuff off my face," he added.

"You didn't—you only streaked it worse," she smiled. "But by daylight it wouldn't help much, and you'd scare horses now. Never mind—it may work better that way. Lu Yan is watching Pedro and Manuel. He thinks they are going to do something with those two poor boys, and that's why I waked you. They wouldn't really torture them, would they?" she questioned anxiously.

"They won't be let!"

Dan set down his cup and got up from the table. He was met at the door by Lu Yan, finger on lip.

"Keep out of sight! Pedro is marching Masters up the path, holding the big gun at his back, and the bandits are ready for something. If you are seen and known, the killing will begin and Masters will be the first to die."

"What can we do? What *can* we do?" Marion was close behind Wheeler, and had heard Lu Yan's whisper. "Can't we—can't you shoot that brute as he comes up the path?"

"Shsh-h!" Dan cautioned her. "That would be as bad—there are forty of them

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with rifles down there in the yard." He was looking out at the east window. "This looks like a show-down!"

In an instant he was cool and taut as a bowstring. Although he had neither understanding of what this meant nor a clear plan of action, he felt within him the power to meet and master these foul creatures somehow.

"Push that outer door part way open," he directed Lu Yan, "and stand in the opening to parley with them."

He looked to his side-arms, Ribera's ornamented guns and knife, and laid aside the sword. Then he stepped outside, keeping close to the courtyard wall, out of sight from without.

"Keep behind me," he cautioned Marion in a whisper as he stole along to a position where he could peep through the crack of the entrance door. Lu Yan already stood in the opening.

"Step outside and talk," Dan whispered. "Spar for wind."

Masters was stumbling and staggering up the path on his swollen and benumbed feet. His hands were still tied behind him, and Pedro held Masters own Sharps rifle at his back to poke him on.

"It will go off," the girl whispered and covered her mouth with her own hand to stifle a cry. But she couldn't help asking Dan as they waited, peering through the crack past Lu Yan, "What does it mean?"

"For one thing," Dan growled hoarsely, "It means that Greaser gets his—pretty—soon!"

And there was nothing funny in his make-up at the moment, as he loosened the long knife in his belt. It was a beautiful knife, long and slenderly pointed.

In the courtyard the bandits were in a compact mass, all with rifles ready to come to shoulder. Pedro was pushing Masters with the muzzle of the Sharps. Twice Masters fell and struggled to his feet. At last he stood panting within a few yards of the entrance, Pedro, scowling and grunting his command to halt, still boring his back with the gun-muzzle.

"You yellow man!" he shouted hoarsely. "I geeve you the order now. Eef you try shoot—I shoot thees man—they all shoot you!"

He shouted over his shoulder an order in Spanish. The bandits below spread out and pointed their rifles at the entrance. As they did so, they uncovered King, lying bound in their midst. Some of them kicked the bound man out of the way.

"If you wake your chief, he will have you shot," said Lu Yan calmly.

"The chief has gone! He ees not," Pedro shouted hoarsely.

With a growled command to Masters to stand still, he held the cocked rifle in his right hand, while with his left he drew and fired a blued revolver—Masters' own gun—in the air.

"Ho! Señor Ribera!" he bellowed. He stood listening for a moment, then, his brutal face fierce and exultant with expectant cruelty, spat toward Lu Yan.

"He ees gone. He leave you gringo pigs—we make you squeal! You are to us. Send out the woman to us—biffore we geev thees men to the ants." He snarled at Masters, jamming the rifle in his back. "Speak! Eees it so?"

"He means he'll bury us in an ant-hill down there on the plain if you don't give her up," Masters called hoarsely. "Don't mind what he says. Hide her—you know where—and shoot us! You hear, in there, Sled—Sled Wheeler—*Shoot us!*"

"Shot op!" Pedro jabbed him. "I shoot!"

"Shoot and be ——! You hear inside? Don't let 'em get you alive—they'll do it! And shoot us first! Kill as many as you can—but shoot us first—*Do it now!*"

He kept it up at the top of his voice, while Pedro swore and clubbed his revolver to knock him in the head. Pedro had not foreseen this, and he wanted to keep the victims for the pleasant sport of the ant-hill.

Inside, Marion was holding to Wheeler's arm, trying to keep him from dashing out. She had never heard of this ant method of torture, but Dan had. King had explained it at great length, and Dan had a vivid fancy—he could see the two heads acrawl with tearing struggling ants, flopping, biting, mouthing——

For many hours now he had held himself under double wraps, watching these foul beasts at their revels, seething within to get at them, and this was the last unbearable flick on the raw. He was struggling to get away, but gently—not to hurt Marion.

Masters heard the stir inside and called again.

"Wheeler! Sled Wheeler—" desperately —"*Shoot! Do what I'd do for you!*"

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It was the cry of grim man to man.

"Coming, Cinch—Coming! Let go!"

CLAPPING Ribera's long, gleaming knife in his teeth for effect, with a gun in each hand and in the dead chief's gaudy clothes, Dan leaped from the half-open door like a tiger unleashed.

From a pale face streaked and distorted with a snarl that bared the teeth—white teeth set on the glittering blade—his green eyes shot a demon's glare. He was an incarnate ecstasy of the lust to kill.

Yet at such times—a man-killer to the *n*th power—he possessed an uncanny instinct for doing the impossible, for using every advantage.

Pedro saw before him the avenging ghost of his dead chief transformed into something terrifying—devilish.

Before he could pull the trigger with a palsied finger the thing was upon him. Pedro fell with a bullet through his heart, and Dan landed on the body with both feet—jumped on it as he growled to Masters through clenched teeth—

"Get in there!"

As he motioned toward the entrance he leaped down the path, waving his guns and bounding like a deer—straight for the mob of armed bandits before the bunk-house.

Although forty Winchesters were aimed at him, not a shot was fired. Even Manuel saw this thing as the spirit of Ribera transformed into a demon of revenge. One long, stupid stare, and the superstitious mob fell over one another as they scrambled to get away from this horror—some swarmed round one corner, some streamed for the other, some jammed in the open doorway—anywhere to get away!

And It came a-shooting. Dan reached King where he lay bound and staring at this miracle, and at close view King saw who it was. Dumbly he held up his feet for Dan to slash at the ropes.

Dan took a shot at either side of the bunk-house, holstered one gun and whipped the knife from his teeth to cut King free.

"Get on your feet! I'll keep 'em busy!" Again Dan was firing, as a few cautious muzzles poked from their places of hiding. "Rub 'em—stomp 'em—get up—get up again!" he urged. "There, —— you!" he growled as he heard a scream from a stricken beast at the door. King's legs felt and acted like rotten wood, crumbling under him as he fell—and fell again.

"No use," he gasped. "God be good t'you, boy! Go save the rest. You're a he-man—and I ain't worth saving," with eyes wet and hoarse voice trembling.

"Get up—get up, or I'll carry you." Dan took another shot and danced aside to dodge a bullet.

Whipping an arm round King as he rolled to all fours, he swung round with him under his arm, took two more shots to drive back the bandits at door and corners, then swung and reeled away toward the path.

Every three steps he swung aside to fire and swing again—still dragging and half-carrying King, who was swearing and kicking his feet on the ground.

"Lemme down! They'll get you—Lemme down! —— fool!" grunted King as the bullets whistled and chugged the earth, knocked off Dan's high gold-laced hat and ripped their clothing.

"Like ——!" Dan made another sidewise swing and dash of a few steps as he paused to fire his last shot. "Up you go!"

Holstering his guns, he swung his shoulder under King and heaved him up as they came to the foot of the path.

"Lemme down! I can go. Lemme down!" King rolled off and staggered a few steps before he fell.

Dan pounced on him and dragged him to his feet, jerking him from side to side as he tacked up the slope.

"You go up!" he panted. "'F I got to—knock you'n the head—'n drag you!"

He pulled and hauled, keeping King balanced and staggering zigzag as the rifles rattled faster and the bullets threw dirt over them.

Above them on the terrace Masters was out now, rubbing his freed hands, and got his Sharps rifle from Pedro's body. Lu Yan was beside him, firing two Colts.

"Good man, Sled!" Masters shouted, as both he and the Chinaman came to the rescue, shooting as they ran. "Keep a-slewing. We'll cover you—keep a-slewing!"

And the big gun roared, chipping the corner of the bunk-house and silencing all fire from that end.

Lu Yan soon had King by the other arm, and they got King through the entrance without a serious wound. Only Dan had been grazed along the temple.

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Marion helped Masters push to the heavy door, for Masters' hands were still almost useless from the bonds that had benumbed them.

"Let me fix that," was her first word, as she brought water and cloth to wash Dan's head, and her brown eyes gleamed soft and brilliant with tears. "You might have been killed!"

Her voice trembled on the edge of a sob. King sat on the ground rubbing his feet with hands of wood.

"It just ain't possible," was his comment as he turned away his head from the picture of Dan and the girl. "Not a man hit bad—they fired more'n a hundred shots." He looked up at Masters and jerked his head toward Wheeler. "Ever see such a bull-head? And talk about nerve—and luck! He's a reg'lar rip-roarin' maniac—a plumb fightin' fool! How the howlin' blazes did he come to think of it?"

By this time Dan was listening, as he sat enjoying the bandaging of his head. King turned to him to say huskily:

"You had about the chance of the same old snowball in ——; but I take off my hat! You saved a darn poor specimen—I don't see yet how you come to hatch it up, but you saved our skins! How come it, anyhow?"

"I didn't hatch up anything." Dan grinned for the first time in many days—all his moody sourness gone, melted by the general warmth and admiration. He grinned straight in King's blood-caked face. "I don't do any thinking—such times." He was still panting. "I just heard Masters' call—I knew about that ant business—and I kind of—I guess I lost my temper again."

"I guess you did, Sled!" Masters smiled his slow, dark smile. "But that running sideways was all that saved you, at that. You sure slewed to some purpose that time. And your scheme of working Ribera is what has saved us all, so far. A fool for luck!" And as he turned away to conceal the trembling of his chin—a thing new to him—he added, "and a fiend for fighting!"

Marion was very quiet. As she finished bandaging Dan's head she looked up at Masters with a flash of her dark eyes.

"You men! You know you're just as proud of him as—as I am!" And she turned away, too, to fix some food for the two freed captives who had not eaten for twenty-four hours, leaving a young man in the gaudy clothes of the bandit chief the color of a sunset.

XII

MANUEL had taken command of the bandits. With more brains than either his absurdly vain chief or the stupid Pedro it is possible he had foreseen the possibility and had sent Pedro to the parley in the hope that the lieutenant would get himself shot. He lost little time in carrying out his plans to take advantage of the situation. He ordered two bodies thrown into the cañon—one of them still weakly struggling—and the wounded he permitted to attend to themselves.

Dan, keeping watch at the entrance, was sorely tempted to drop the new leader with the Sharps—it would be an easy shot. He was restrained only by a feeling that it was better to have the mob under the control of a chief. At least they were gaining time, and a shot might bring on a general attack. The beasts would fight for the booty and the girl—that was sure.

Again he was confronted with the certain outcome of an attack by the whole band, and again he felt his muscles tighten with the thought that somebody must save a shot for the girl. He felt sure it would fall to him, and every time the prospect was—he would tell her to cover her eyes!

There was no doubt but that Manuel knew or suspected the outlet of the passage from the cellar to the top of the cañon wall. He had sent reinforcements up the pass to the guard posted above. And as Dan watched he saw the new chief gather his band in the yard for a general harangue. He called out to King to listen at the east window and he himself watched the gestures of the excited Mexican before the bunk-house door. Manuel was gesturing with his lean brown hands, pointing to the wall-top and to the Stone House, and at the finish he was cheered.

"They'll be coming soon," King reported from the few words he had caught. "He's promisin' them all they'll all be rich if they get the gold—he thinks it's gold—and—all kinds of things."

Not one of the prisoners but knew what it meant if Marion fell into the hands of this band.

"Time to get what we may need into the cave," Dan announced. "Can you open the stone, Lu Yan?"

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"It has been open for some time—I take no chances." Lu Yan was already carrying a lantern and two pails, and Masters had a basket. "We have all we need. I show you."

The Chinaman led the way to the cellar and Dan, after a look to make sure the bandits had not yet started up the hill, followed last with the big rifle and his captured guns.

At the stair-bottom a large rectangular stone in the wall had been swung to right angles with the surface, leaving a hole large enough to crawl through on hands and knees. Lu Yan lighted the lantern, sheltering the match from the draft that came down the passage and through the opening, then led the party through.

They were in a rounded chamber large enough for a dozen people. On their right was an upright shaft down which water came sliding and spraying to disappear in depths of blackness. At the side of this pit was a trough hollowed out of one solid stone into which a part of the water fell and filled it to overflowing. This trough stood close beside the movable stone in the wall, which still stood open.

"There is the mystery—very simple, like all mysteries, when you know."

As Lu Yan spoke he moved a thin stone slab that rested on a shelf in the water's path. The stream no longer fell into the bowl or trough, and soon it emptied itself through a hole in the bottom.

While the water was trickling out, Lu Yan swung the big stone door back into place. It moved slowly but easily, balanced on a pivot or nub of flint, and the emptied stone trough settled gently back in its bed. When it came to rest its corner overlapped the corner of the swinging stone and held it in place in the wall.

"And the door is locked!" Lu Yan spoke as if he had been describing the process they had watched. "The water must run in faster than it runs out, or the bowl will never fill and the door can not open. So it can only be worked from the other side when much water comes down the shaft."

"Ought to be a hole so you could turn the stream from the other side of the wall," said Dan practically. "What is the empty pail for?"

"To put the diamonds in."

In the silence, while the other stared in the lantern-light, Lu Yan calmly moved the slab again to turn the water into the trough.

"They may be waiting in the cellar," Dan whispered.

"Hardly!" Lu Yan spoke in an ordinary tone. "If they are, we can keep them back."

Slowly, very slowly, the bowl was filling up, and Wheeler could not wait.

"Tell us," he broke out. "Where is the hiding-place?"

"It is hard to describe, but I can show you when the stone is swung," said Lu Yan. "That is why Uncle U could not say it in a few words."

Impatiently waiting, Dan was reminded of the words, "where Ribera would never look," and he spoke again.

"Ribera thought nobody knew of this but him, so he would never look here."

"That is why I *did* look here." Lu Yan was complacent. "And in the last place one would stop to look—while the stone is swinging."

When at last the filled trough tipped away, Lu Yan pressed on the door until it swung part-way open and stopped. Passing his hand upward, he reached into a hole in the top of the opening. The hole was in the face of the living rock where it was covered when the door was shut or entirely open and where it could only be seen if one lay on his back on the floor. Passing his bent arm up and sidewise to the shoulder, he brought out a small canvas sack tied and sealed with red wax. As Dan took it and put it in the pail he said reverently—

"And nobody but a Chinaman would ever think of it!"

The others were holding their breath, and Lu Yan deliberately passed out six of the canvas sacks, each one with a metal tag. On each tag was stamped a date, one for each of six years, and some Chinese characters.

"Lon Cheng did this," said the Chinaman, looking at the last tag.

"What does it say?"

"The value of the contents—at the time."

"How much?" It was Marion who whispered.

"A great deal," said the Chinaman. "You will be very rich."

He would say no more.

"I don't care," Marion broke out. "It's not for myself. If we get away I want you all to have something worth while, and we shall share alike."

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"Likely!" snorted Dan. "But what to do with 'em now?"

"Each take one, and Lu Yan two," proposed Marion. "Hang 'em around your necks under your shirts."

There seemed no better plan, so Lu Yan deftly tied the cords of sheep-twine for them all. Meanwhile the stone door stood open.

STILL there came no sound from outside. But when the sacks were hidden Masters held up his hand.

"Listen! Somebody's knocking on that outside door. I'll see what's up."

"Careful," Dan cautioned. "Don't get hurt. Remember you're valuable now!"

"I'll come back."

He cautiously peeped before crawling through the opening, and as he was about to go Marion had a thought.

"Couldn't you bring me Dan's—Mr. Wheeler's clothes? I could climb and ride better." She flushed richly.

"Good work! They're in the last room on the right," said Dan. "Get 'em if you can." Masters nodded and was gone. Dan added, "That's good thinking—we may have a chance to fool them again."

Masters was gone for only a few minutes. He came back with the clothes and the report:

"Manuel wanted to talk to the chief—'him with the green eye'—but I told him to wait for an answer. He offers to let us go—the rest of us—if we pass out the gold and the girl. Otherwise he will smash us like bugs."

"He thinks we're fools," said Dan. "Suppose we'd give him a chance like that!"

"Listen: he says the men don't know where the upper outlet is. If we hand out the girl and the gold—he still thinks it's gold—he will call down the guards up top, and while they all celebrate in the yard we can make our getaway up top."

"Why didn't you shoot the cur before you came back?" said Dan. "And how's he going to smash us?"

"He can smash the Stone House—they're rolling a big rock up there now—the 'Balanced Rock' at the lookout. But the point is this: if they don't know the upper outlet, we've got a chance!"

"Come a-runnin'!" King was already scrambling up the slope of the cave passage.

The others were after him close. Marion and Dan were the last to start up the dark slope, and Lu Yan stayed back to light the girl up the rough pathway. Like all such caverns it was made up of narrow passages connecting larger rooms at different levels, and in the next room the girl stopped.

"If you have a candle I will change my clothes here," she said to Dan. "Wait for me, for only a moment, just above."

With the intelligence called intuition she felt that her chances of escape were better in men's clothes, and Dan was in accord. Lu Yan had candles, and he lighted one for her.

Dan, meanwhile, had remembered the open stone door below. He took another candle and slowly returned to close it, sheltering his flickering light with his hand. As he neared the opening he heard footsteps running away from the spot and up the cellar steps, then Manuel's voice shouting outside.

He paused for a while to listen before closing the swinging stone. While the water was running out of the trough there came a rattle of falling stones—a crash—then an earth-shaking, rending roar.

In the rushing and clatter of falling stones that followed in diminishing volume Dan dropped to his knees before the opening—he could see straight out into the cañon. Half the cellar floor with its outer wall was gone—the Stone House must be almost entirely ruined.

He could hear Manuel's voice shouting—coming nearer. He tried to close the swinging stone that the opening might not betray their retreat, but the masonry had been shaken so that the stone would not move. They were open to attack from below!

"Dan—Dan Wheeler! Are you hurt?" Marion's voice came from above, sharp with anxiety. "Dan—Dan!" In rising panic.

"All right—never touched me!" called Dan, bounding up regardless of the blown-out candle.

Marion caught his hand and they ran upward to Lu Yan's light that twinkled far above. In the third room they were met by Masters and King, who had been up to the outlet on the shelf at the cañon-rim.

"They are scattered all round," Masters reported. "But nobody near the hole where we come out—and nobody near the corral. Not any nearer the corral than the hole is, anyway. If we can get to the

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corral, get a horse apiece and stampede the balance of 'em, we stand a good chance—What's that?" He stopped to sniff the air.

The air-current no longer drew down the passage, but was coming up—warmer, and bringing a stifling smoke.

"Come ahead!" He started up again. "They're smoking us out. Paw gravel!"

And that they literally did. Marion had got her hair twisted tight under a broad Stetson, and in Dan's pants she could keep pace with any of them.

But the billowing smoke came thicker and faster. When they reached the outlet on the shelf, all crawled though the close bushes and lay hidden from the table-land, just over the cañon-rim.

"The smoke will make 'em look in a minute," Masters panted. "This has got to be quick action—give your orders, Sled."

Dan took a look over the edge, saw that the corral, with a few horses ready saddled, was as near to them as to the nearest guard. With one look at the surrounding country he ducked his head and whispered rapidly:

"Beat them to the corral—Miss Marion, King and Lu Yan jump on the saddled horses and ride through the valley to the north. Masters and I rope two horses, stampede the rest of them across the plain to the west—then follow you three up the valley—how's that?"

"Can't beat it." Masters slapped his leg. "On the jump!"

They were up and off at the word. King and Lu Yan ran on each side of the girl, who made them do their best to keep level.

LIKE Wheeler's flash-light plans in general, theirs seemed inspired and bound to succeed. The scattered guards, half-asleep, first stared stupidly. Some of them must have been unaware of Dan's appearance in Ribera's gorgeous raiment, or had never thought of the cave passage and thought they were seeing a ghost. Some of them ran to shout at the lookout, some ran toward the outlet instead of toward the corral.

Manuel came storming up the pass, shouting to his band to get the woman; but in the confusion none of them counted the fugitives, and Marion's disguise saved her, for the nearest guards hastened to surround the outlet where they expected the smoke soon to drive her out.

Lu Yan, King and Marion got the saddled horses and were off up the valley. Masters and Dan had their picked mounts roped and saddled, were driving the others out when the bandits arrived at the corral.

If there had not been three mounted guards at the head of the pass, out of sight from the corral, they would have got a clean start. As it was, Manuel seized the horse of the first guard, snatched off the rider, mounted and came tearing into the stampeding horses before they were half out of the enclosure.

Manuel had cut out and milled back some of the animals while his men roped and mounted half a dozen others, when Dan came bounding out of the gate on a black stallion. He rode straight at Manuel, both fired pointblank and both missed as their horses went down together with the riders.

Riding into this swirl of dust and horses came Masters, just in time to seize the reins of the stallion as he sprang up unhurt. Dan was on his back in a flash, trying to wheel and trample Manuel, who was struggling and clawing on the sand.

"Come on—he's done!" shouted Masters desperately, tugging at the rein and crowding his mount to head Dan off. "They'll get Marion! Come on!"

"Let me loose. I'll kill the ——," gritted Dan. "He killed Parsons!"

With the words he tore free, swerved his mount with knee and rein in a wide pivot-swing, firing another shot into the huddle on the ground, rode his leaping stallion over it and faced a dozen mounted bandits closing in on him and Masters.

"Charge! Ride low," yelled Masters, and their fresh horses bounded into stride together side by side as the two spurred through the flinching line and were off up the valley.

The race was up a winding ravine through the foot-hills of the northern mountains. A dozen of the bandits were close on the heels of Dan and Masters, but the two drew away until they came up with Marion and the other two men. These last were on poor horses, and the bandits now began to gain.

Masters looked over his shoulder and called to Dan:

"That greaser is made of rubber." Then as Dan turned and recognized Manuel: "Now, now! Don't be a fool. Remember the girl!"

For Dan was again afire with that within

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him which made him a terror, once roused and on a man-trail. Masters cursed himself for a fool as he swung to Dan's rein and they slid to a stop. Staring into each other's eyes for an instant, they were almost surrounded before Dan came out of his trance and wheeled to the north again.

A shot from the bandits brought down Masters' horse, and at almost the same instant Dan's mount fell with a broken leg from another unlucky bullet. Masters had to finish the stallion before it kicked Dan's brains out.

They had hardly got to their feet when King and Marion came spurring back down the ravine with Lu Yan close behind.

"Another band ahead," shouted King. "And a bigger one!"

A quick survey showed no escape on the steep shady slope at either side—no cover as good as the dead horses. A compact band of horsemen was coming from the north in a thick cloud of dust that almost entirely concealed them.

"Set down—we shoot it out here," was Dan's instant decision, and at the hoarse words he looked at the pale face of the girl.

She dismounted and came straight to his side, took her place close by him as he faced the new band from the north.

In the look she gave him and in her quiet action there was the most perfect trust. In those level fierce eyes, in his merciless thin lips she could read the deadly certainty of the man, the cold, unswerving purpose, and she was content. In that supreme final moment, when clear vision came like a lightning-bolt, she saw Dan Wheeler for a man that many women would fear and follow—a man no woman could keep all her own.

The moment before it had seemed that escape was near—freedom and all that would make life pleasant—and now it would all be over in a few seconds.

"Don't waste a shot," Dan called to the others. "Don't forget to keep one." And she heard him mutter, "I'll keep two."

She saw him whirl to fire one shot toward the rear where the yelling half-breeds were pressing close, then face about to the dust-cloud in front, now almost within revolver-range. His teeth showed as he took aim over the dead horse at the riders now almost upon them, coming out of the fog. With a heart like ice she took one last look at them, these oncoming demons— It could not be!

Dan was all set to make the most of his last spare shots— no time for more than three— Now was the time! Hand like a rock, he pressed the trigger—and Marion spoiled his aim. She tugged at his arm.

"Stop—stop! They're soldiers. Cavalry from the Fort. That's Captain Preston in front!"

"*Hm!*" Dan growled, raising his head to scowl at the horsemen. "I was going to get both those— Here! I'll do it yet, if they try that again," as a bullet sent Ribera's rich head-piece sailing to the rear and left him bareheaded. His eyes, following it, saw that the bandits had turned tail to scamper flogging down the valley, while King and Masters raised their heads to stare.

"Down—keep down!" Marion pulled at Dan's sleeves. "They'll shoot you in those clothes!"

With rare courage and sense she jumped on the body of the horse, waving an absurd bit of a cambric handkerchief she had kept somehow clean and white.

XIII

"GRE-EAT day! That was close!" Captain Preston, dismounted and hat in hand, wiped from his brow the sweat of anxiety and relief. "We came mighty near shooting you two, Miss Marion. It was your clothes. I didn't know you— and this er—gentleman— Here, wait! What's the matter with the maniac?"

Hand on his gun, the officer stared after the grotesque figure of Wheeler in his bull-fighter costume just disappearing round a near-by lump of mesquite, Ribera's long knife in one hand.

"Put up your revolver." Marion laid a hand on his arm. "That is our commanding general, the man that has saved all our lives twice over!"

"*Hm!* What's he tearing off like that for? And rigged up like a Spanish ambassador! I took him for this Ribera we are after—I thought we'd got the big bandit chief, sure!"

"Those are Ribera's clothes," Marion spoke with a catch in her breath. "And the man in them—has saved you the trouble—already. I don't want to think about it!" She pressed her hands to her eyes with a shiver.

"She's telling you straight," Masters answered the question in the captain's eyes.

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"That's the man who saved our skins. He killed Ribera and put on his clothes to work a clever scheme that saved us all. He killed Ribera's man Pedro, besides, and now I reckon he's after Manuel, the next in command of the bandits. I saw Manuel scuttle into those bushes when his horse was shot and Sled must have got a peep at him. He has a way of finishing things up with a polish—this Sled Wheeler!"

"I can see that, all right," the captain said grimly. "But I don't get this—quite. Isn't this Mr. Masters—Cinch Masters—who was raised in Virginia?" Offering his hand.

"Yes, sir—Hanover County."

"My name is Preston—Albemarle—and I'm glad to meet you, seh."

They shook with grave respect, and Preston went on: "Sled Wheeler—that's the gentleman in the—the clothes? And he has about wiped out Ribera and his officers?"

"Yes, sir. He is after the last of the three now, I reckon. This Manuel shot one of our boys, Dude Parsons, and Dan Wheeler—I call him Sled—he doesn't like to have his friends shot. So I expect he has gone over there to those bushes to see about it." Masters finished gravely. The two Virginians exchanged a quiet look.

"Perhaps I'd better send help in case he gets— No? Very well. I certainly want to meet your friend Wheeler."

"There he comes now!" Marion had been watching the bushes anxiously.

Still bareheaded, Dan stepped out of the bushes, wiping the long blade as he came. He stooped to pick up Ribera's hat from the sand, then came on deliberately, absorbed in examining a blued Colt which he carried although his belt contained both the fancy guns taken from the bandit chief.

"Get Manuel?" Masters called as Dan approached. Dan nodded.

"I had to—he shot Dude," Dan explained, still anxiously looking at the gun as he spun the cylinder. "Besides, he had my gun. I don't like these ivory-handled irons of Ribera's—too slippery."

Looking up, he saw the circle of faces intent and listening, some half-smiling and all admiring. His own face became puzzled and suspicious, his eyes glinting between long, level lids.

"Why?" he asked the officer. "Did you want him—to pick or anything? He's not much of a specimen, but he's in those bushes most as good as ever." He tilted his clean-cut head toward the mesquite.

"Then you didn't—he's not dead?" The officer reached for his bridle-reins, prepared to mount and give chase.

"What? Oh, yes. He's dead."

Dan nodded carelessly, and holstered his gun with loving care, while from the listening ranks there came a smothered snicker.

XIV

A YEAR after the battle of the Lazy-X Ranch Dan Wheeler rode up the graveled drive of the Benton mansion on "the Hill" at San Francisco, mounted on his famous black stallion "Chink."

In a gray-green riding-suit of his own design, high black boots and broad black Stetson, he was a handsome and familiar figure on the streets. Women looked after him, men and newsboys pointed out with pride Sled Wheeler, famous gunman and gambler, or told wild stories of his wealth and exploits, of his deadly nerve and princely generosity.

On the Hill, where the gilded youth flocked round the Benton mansion to pay court to the senator's daughter and her schoolmate, Marion Felton the heiress, Sled Wheeler had come to be a dangerous topic. It was known that Marion would shamelessly break any engagement to ride with her mysterious outlaw admirer whenever he chose to call for her, leading a beautiful gray mare he kept for no other purpose.

This time, however, he was not leading the gray mare. He hardly nodded to the scared and admiring groom as he tossed him the reins, and while he waited for Marion in the pergola he paced the marble tiles, staring across the sunlit turquoise bay to the Golden Gate.

He had changed in the last year. His face had become even more clean-cut and vitally forceful, his lithe body even more graceful and charged with virile power. He strode with the slow, smooth swing of the tiger family, back and forth, restless but unhurried, his features changing with every intent thought. One glance at them showed them still more keenly alive and alert, delicately dangerous and sensitive, more apt to flush with a slow, thin-lipped smile or to set in the green-eyed stare that men called

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benumbing. No man or woman laughed at Dan Wheeler—more than once.

As he paced he talked to himself—a thing he did only when deeply intent on thoughts that stirred him.

"Masters is the man for her. He's as rich as she is now, and he will stay put." For his friend, Cinch, was now a member of the rich importing firm, Lu Yan, Lon Cheng & Co., one of the city's solid men and one of Marion's favored few. "But I have got to keep moving, looking for strong meat. I can't go until I face the music—do the square thing."

And before his dilating eyes the bay no longer sparkled in the sun—he was seeing the lands of the mystic East beyond the Golden Gate, painted for him by his Chinese friends, which called him to come and to learn more of the secret art of handling men.

Marion came, fresh and frankly flushing her pleasure, with her hands outstretched.

Hat in hand, he waited, slowly coloring at the approach and touch of her as usual; but his delicate lips did not widen even to his slow smile.

"We don't ride today? Aren't you going to sit down?"

She patted the seat beside her as she looked up wistfully.

"I want to think straight, and I can do it better on my feet—face to face." A grim pause. "I have dreaded it long enough."

She waited silent, wide-apart eyes dilating as they held his with steady trust, and breathed faster. He went on in the slightly hoarse voice that always seemed to strike straight through her—

"I have been coming here—we have been together long enough, and there's just one right way to stop it."

"You want to—stop it?" With a catch in her breath.

"No. I want to marry you. Now!"

Her quick sigh of relief and delight was cut short—the brightness faded from her face at the last word.

"Now? What do you mean?" she whispered.

"I mean I have wanted you for a year. I want you now. But I wanted to marry a girl once—twice before."

"Yes—don't torture me, Dan!"

Her lips trembled and he turned away his head with a wooden jerk that showed the strain of his effort, while he went ahead.

"The first time I didn't tell the girl because she didn't know, and I knew it would not be fair. The other girl didn't wait for me. Then I saw you—and forgot them both."

Still she waited, mouth drooping at its sweet corners, eyes upturned and waiting for his. He kept his head turned away as he kept on.

"This time was the hardest—I can't see now how it can stop, but it stopped before. If you should marry me and if it ever stopped, it would be —— for one of us!"

At the final hoarse whisper her head dropped into her hands.

Feeling her eyes no longer on him, Dan looked down at the bright head bowed before him, his face softened and his voice low and clear continued:

"No use telling anything but the straight truth. I believe you—would marry me if I tried to—make you. But I am not going to make you. I may be a fool, but I will not try that. I'd even hurt you now—to keep from hurting you more." He drew a long, catchy breath. "I don't know—I *do not know* that I shall stay this way. Do you? It comes down to that. Do you want to take a chance? It's a gamble!"

Her face came up, glad and trusting, and he met her look fairly. In his long, level eyes the green darkened almost to black as they embraced her with fierce tenderness. She leaned to him but paled as she whispered—

"You would leave me—if you stopped loving me?"

"I would—yes." He chose hard words. "You take that chance—with me."

"I am afraid of you—for the first time—Dan!" Her lips trembled. Wheeler's face turned bleak and hard.

"That is what I wanted to know." And he turned half toward the door.

"I mean—" she stretched out a quick hand—"that I am afraid—afraid you would stop loving me, Dan!"

The last came out with a pitiful cry that stopped him. He drew a quick breath, hissing between the white teeth half-bared in a tight grimace of pain, and straightened his face as he turned it back to her.

"So—am I!" He spoke low and soberly.

Half-way to the door he was stopped again by a low appealing call—

"Dan," and still more softly, "Dan!"

"Well?" The lure of her eyes drew him back to her. "Well?"

"You know that I want you more than anything—whatever happens?"

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He looked down at her, so softened and sweet with sad longing, and at last his lips drew in a slow smile as he repeated softly—

"So—do I!"

Swinging on his heel he went slowly out and down the path without once turning his head. Before he passed a turn in the hedge he put on his hat with a wide swinging gesture and stepped out of sight. The girl on the stone bench sobbed into her hands—

"If only he had kissed me—once!"

Below on the carriage-drive Dan was mounting Chink. He swung lightly into the saddle, tossed the groom a gold eagle and rode away.

As he stared across the bay between Chink's small listening ears he told him—

"Probably I am a —— fool!"

The stallion bounded under an impatient spur and shook his head in violent denial.

THE MAID

By John Buchan

Author of "Prester John", etc.

The Fifth Tale in the Series, "The Path of a King." Each Story Entirely Complete in Itself.

The Story behind the Stories

SO THAT the general idea of this series of stories may be more visible in each issue, two of them each time appear together. For in the stories themselves there is practically nothing concrete to indicate any connection between one of them and any of the others. Each story stands entirely on its own feet, complete in itself and differing from all the others in place and time and plot. Yet through them all runs a Path—a Path of a thousand years—"The Path of a King."

As expressed in the author's foreword to the series, it is not for nothing that a great man leaves posterity. The spark once transmitted may smolder for generations under ashes, but at the appointed time it will flare up to warm the world. God never allows waste. Yet we fools rub our eyes and wonder when we see genius come out of the gutter. We none of us know our ancestors beyond a little way. We all of us may have kings' blood in our veins. The dago who blacked your boots may be descended by curious byways from Julius Cæsar.

"I saw the younger sons carry the royal blood far down among the people, down even into the kennels of the outcast. Generations follow, but there is that in the stock which is fated to endure. The sons and daughters blunder and sin and perish, but the race goes on, for there is a fierce stuff of life in it. Some rags of greatness always cling to it, and somehow the blood drawn from kings it never knew will be royal again. After long years, unheralded and unlooked for, there comes the day of the Appointed Time."

You will note that practically the only surface suggestion of any kind of connection between one story and any of the others is that the king's ring of the old Norse viking, introduced in the first story, is more or less casually mentioned in following stories and of course is always in possession of some one descended from that king, though the king himself has long since faded from human memory.

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THE hostel of the *Ane Rayé* poured from its upper and lower windows a flood of light into the gathering August dusk. It stood, a little withdrawn among its beeches, at a cross-roads, where the main route southward from the Valois cut the highway from Paris to Rheims and Champagne.

The roads at that hour made ghostly white ribbons, and the forecourt of dusty grasses seemed of a verdure which daylight would disprove. Weary horses nuzzled at a water-trough and serving-men in a dozen liveries made a bustle around the stables, which formed two sides of the open quadrangle. At the foot of the inn sign-post beggars squatted—here a leper, whining monotonously, there lustier vagrants dicing for supper. At the main door a knot of young squires stood talking in whispers—impatient, if one judged from the restless clank of metal, but on duty as appeared when a newcomer sought entrance and was bruskly denied. For in an upper room there was business of great folk, and the commonalty must keep its distance.

That upper room was long and low-ceiled, with a canopied bed in a corner and an oaken table heaped with saddle-bags. A woman sat in a chair by the empty hearth, very bright and clear in the glow of the big iron lantern hung above the chimney. She was a tall girl, exquisitely dressed, from the fine silk of her horned cap to the amethyst buckles on her Spanish shoes.

The saddle-bags showed that she was fresh from a journey, but her tirewoman's hands must have been busy, for she bore no marks of the road.

Her chin was in her hands, and the face defined by the slim fingers was small and delicate, pale with the clear pallor of perfect health and now slowly flushing to some emotion. The little chin was firm, but the mouth was pettish. Her teeth bit on a gold chain, which encircled her neck and held a crystal reliquary. A spoiled pretty child, she looked, and in a mighty ill-temper.

The cause of it was a young man who stood disconsolately by a settle a little out of the glow of the lantern. The dust of the white roads lay on his body-armor and coated the scabbard of his great sword. He played nervously with the plume of a helmet which lay on the settle and lifted his face now and then to protest a word. It was an honest face, ruddy with wind and sun and thatched with hair which his mislikers called red but his friends golden.

The girl seemed to have had her say. She turned wearily aside and drew the chain between her young lips with a gesture of despair.

"Since when have you become Burgundian, Catherine?" the young man asked timidly.

The Sieur Guy de Laval was most notable in the field, but he had few arts for a lady's chamber.

"I am no Burgundian," she said, "but neither am I Armagnac. What concern have we in these quarrels? Let the kings who seek thrones do the fighting. What matters it to us whether knock-kneed Charles or fat Philip reign in Paris?"

The young man shuddered as if at a blasphemy.

"This is our country of France. I would rid it of the English and all foreign blood-suckers."

"And your way is to foment the quarrel among Frenchmen? You are a fool, Guy. Make peace with Burgundy, and in a month there will be no God-dams left in France."

"It is the voice of La Tremouille."

"It is the voice of myself, Catherine of Beaumanoir. And if my kinsman of La Tremouille say the same, the opinion is none the worse for that. You meddle with matters beyond your understanding. But have done with statecraft, for that is not the heart of my complaint.

"You have broken your pledged word, sir. Did you not promise me when you set out that you would abide the issue of the Bourbon's battle before you took arms? Yet I have heard of you swashbuckling in that very fight at Rouvray, and only the miracle of God brought you out with an unbroken neck."

"The Bourbon never fought," said de Laval sullenly. "Only Steward and his Scots stood up against Fastolf's spears. You would not have me stay idle in face of such odds. I was not the only French knight who charged. There was La Hire and de Saintrailles and the Bastard himself."

"Yet you broke your word," was the girl's cold answer. "Your word to me. You are forsworn, sir."

The boy's face flushed deeply.

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"You do not understand, my sweet Catherine. There have been mighty doings in Touraine, which you have not heard of in Picardy. Miracles have come to pass, Orleans has been saved, and there is now a great army behind Charles. In a little we shall drive the English from Paris and presently into the sea. There is hope now and a clear road for us Frenchmen. We have heard the terrible English 'hurrah' grow feeble and 'St. Denis' swell like a wind in heaven. For God has sent us the Maid."

The girl had risen and was walking with quick, short steps from hearth to open window.

"Tell me of this Maid," she commanded.

"Beyond doubt she is a daughter of God," said de Laval.

"Beyond doubt. But I would hear more of her."

Her tone was ominously soft, and the young man was deceived by it. He launched into a fervid panegyric of Jeanne of Arc. He told of her doings at Orleans, when her standard became the oriflamme of France and her voice was more stirring than trumpets; of her gentleness and her wisdom. He told of his first meeting with her, when she welcomed him in her chamber.

"She sent for wine and said that soon she would drink it with me in Paris. I saw her mount a plunging black horse, herself all in white armor, but unhelmeted. Her eyes were those of a great captain, and yet merciful and mild like God's mother. The sight of her made the heart sing like a May morning. No man could fear death in her company. They tell how——"

But he got no further. The girl's face was pale with fury, and she tore at her gold neck-chain till it snapped.

"Enough of your Maid!" she cried. "Maid, forsooth! The shame of her has gone throughout the land. She is no maid, but a witch, a light-of-love, a blasphemer. By the rood, Sir Guy, you choose this instant between me and your foul peasant. A daughter of Beaumanoir does not share her lover with a crack-brained virago."

The young man had also gone pale beneath his sunburn.

"I will not listen," he cried. "You blaspheme a holy angel."

"But listen you shall," and her voice quivered with passion.

She marched up to him and faced him her slim figure as stiff as a spear.

"This very hour you break this mad allegiance and conduct me home to Beaumanoir. Or by the sorrows of Mary, you and I will never meet again."

De Laval did not speak, but stood gazing sadly at the angry loveliness before him. His own face had grown as stubborn as hers.

"You do not know what you ask," he said at length. "You would have me forswear my God and my king and my manhood."

"A fig for such manhood," she cried with ringing scorn. "If that is a man's devotion, I will end my days in a nunnery. I will have none of it, I tell you. Choose, my fine lover—choose between me and your peasant."

The young man looked again at the blazing eyes and then without a word turned slowly and left the room. A moment later the noise of horses told that a company had taken the road.

THE girl stood listening till the noise died away. Then she sank all limp in a chair and began to cry. There was wrath in her sobs and bitter self-pity. She had made a fine tragedy-scene, but the glory of it was short. She did not regret it, but an immense dreariness had followed on her heroics. Was there ever, she asked herself, a more unfortunate lady?

And she had been so happy. Her lover was the bravest gallant that ever came out of Brittany; rich, too, and well beloved and kin to de Richemont, the constable. In the happy days at Beaumanoir he was the leader in jousts and valiances, the soul of hunting-parties, the lightest foot in the dance. The Beaumanoirs had been a sleepy stock, ever since that Sir Aimery long ago who had gone crusading with St. Louis and ridden out of the ken of mortals.

Their wealth had brought them peace, and they had kept on good terms alike with France and Burgundy and even with the unruly captains of England. Wars might sweep round their marches, but their fields were unravaged. Shrewd, peaceable folk they were, at least the males of the house. The women had been different, for the daughters of Beaumanoir had been notable for beauty and wit and had married proudly, till the family was kin to half the nobleness of Artois and Picardy and Champagne.

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There was that terrible great-aunt at Coucy and the aunts at Beaulieu and Avranches and the endless cousinhood stretching as far south as the Nivernais. And now the main stock had flowered in her, the sole child of her father and the best match to be found that side of the Loire.

She sobbed in the chagrin of a new experience. No one in her soft-cushioned life had ever dared to gainsay her. At Beaumanoir her word was law. She had loved its rich idleness for the power it gave her. Luxurious as she was, it was no passive luxury that she craved, but the sense of mastery, of being a rare thing set apart.

The spirit of the women of Beaumanoir burned fiercely in her. She longed to set her lover in the forefront of the world. Let him crusade if he chose, but not in a beggar's quarrel. And now the palace of glass was shivered and she was forsaken for a peasant *béguine*. The thought set her pacing to the window.

There seemed to be a great to-do without. A dozen lanterns lighted up the forecourt, and there was a tramping of many horses. A shouting, too, as if a king were on the move. She hurriedly dried her eyes, and arranged her dress, tossing the reliquary and its broken chain on the table.

Some new guests; and the inn was none too large. She would have the landlord flayed if he dared to intrude on the privacy which she had commanded. Nay, she would summon her people that instant and set off for home, for her company was strong enough to give security in the midnight forests. She was about to blow a little silver whistle to call her steward, when a step at the door halted her.

A figure entered, a stranger. It was a tall stripling, half-armed like one who is not for battle but expects a brush at any corner of the road. A long surcoat of dark green and crimson fell stiffly as if it covered metal, and the boots were spurred and defended in front with thin plates of steel. The light helm was open and showed a young face. The stranger moved wearily, as if from a long journey.

"Good even to you, sister," said the voice, a musical voice with the broad accent of Lorraine. "Help me to get rid of this weariful harness."

Catherine's annoyance was forgotten in amazement. Before she knew what she did, her fingers were helping the bold youth to disarm. The helm was removed, the surcoat was stripped, and the steel corselet beneath it. With a merry laugh the stranger kicked off the great boots which were too wide for his slim legs.

He stretched himself, yawning, and then laughed again.

"By my staff," he said, "but I am the weary one."

He stood now in the full glow of the lantern, and Catherine saw that he wore close-fitting breeches of fine linen, a dark *pourpoint* and a tunic of blue. The black hair was cut short like a soldier's, and the small secret face had the clear tan of one much abroad in wind and sun. The eyes were tired and yet merry, great gray eyes as clear and deep as a moorland lake.

Suddenly she understood. It may have been the sight of the full laughing lips or the small maidenly breasts outlined by the close-fitting linen. At any rate she did not draw back when the stranger kissed her cheek.

"Ah, now I am woman again," said the crooning voice.

The unbuckled sword in its leather sheath was laid on the table beside the broken reliquary.

"Let us rest side by side, sister, for I long for maids' talk."

But now Catherine started and recoiled. For on the blue tunic she had caught sight of an embroidered white dove bearing in its beak the scroll *De par le Roy du ciel*. It was a blazon the tale of which had gone through France.

"You are she!" she stammered. "The witch of Lorraine!"

The other looked wonderingly at her.

"I am Jeanne of Arc," she said simply. "She whom they call 'the Pucelle.' Do you shrink from me, sister?"

CATHERINE'S face was aflame. She remembered her lost lover and the tears scarcely dry.

"Out upon you!" she cried. "You are that false woman that corrupts men's hearts."

And again her fingers sought the silver whistle.

Jeanne looked sadly upon her. Her merry eyes had grown very grave.

"I pray you forbear. I do not heed the abuse of men, but a woman's taunts hurt me. They have spoken falsely of me, dear

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sister. I am no witch, but a poor girl who would fain do the commands of God."

She sank on the settle with the relaxed limbs of utter fatigue.

"I was happy when they told me there was a lady here. I bade Louis and Raymond and the Sieur d'Aulon leave me undisturbed till morning, for I would fain rest. Oh, but I am weary of councils! They are all blind. They will not hear the plain wishes of God. And I have so short a time! Only a year, and now half is gone!"

The figure had lost all its buoyancy and become that of a sad, overwrought girl. Catherine found her anger ebbing and pity stealing into her heart. Could this tired child be the virago against whom she had sworn vengeance? It had none of a woman's allure, no arts of the light-of-love. Its eyes were as simple as a boy's. She looked almost kindly at the drooping Maid.

But in a moment the languor seemed to pass from her. Her face lighted up, as to the watcher in the darkness a window in a tower suddenly becomes a square of light. She sank on her knees, her head thrown back, her lips parted, the long eyelashes quiet on her cheeks. A sudden stillness seemed to fall on everything. Catherine held her breath and listened to the beating of her heart.

Jeanne's lips moved, and then her eyes opened. She stood up again, her face entranced and her gaze still dwelling on some hidden world. Never had Catherine seen such happy radiance.

"My brothers of paradise spoke with me. They call me sometimes when I am sad. Their voices said to me 'Daughter of God, go forward. We are at your side.' "

Catherine trembled. She seemed on the edge of a world of which in all her cossetted life she had never dreamed, a world of beautiful and terrible things. There was rapture in it and a great awe. She had forgotten her grievances in wonder.

"Do not shrink from me," said the voice which seemed to have won an unearthly sweetness. "Let us sit together and tell our thoughts. You are very fair. Have you a lover?"

The word brought the girl to earth.

"I had a lover, but this night I dismissed him. He fights in your company, and I see no need for this war."

Jeanne's voice was puzzled.

"Can a man fight in a holier cause than to free his country?"

"The country——"

But Catherine faltered. Her arguments to Guy now seemed only pettishness.

"You are a great lady," said Jeanne, "and to such as you liberty may seem a little thing. You are so rich that you need never feel constraint. But to us poor folk freedom is life itself. It sweetens the hind's pottage and gives the meanest assurance of manhood.

"Likewise it is God's will. My holy ones have told me that sweet France shall be purged from bondage. They have bidden me see the king crowned and lead him to Paris. After that they have promised me rest."

She laid an arm round Catherine's neck and looked into her eyes.

"You are hungry, sister mine," she said.

The girl started. For the eyes were no longer those of a boy, but of a mother—very wise, very tender. Her own mother had died so long ago that she scarcely remembered her. A rush of longing came over her for something that she had never known. She wanted to lay her head on that young breast and weep.

"You are hungry—and yet I think you have been much smiled on by Fortune. You are very fair, and for most women to be beautiful is to be happy. But you are not content, and I am glad of it. There is a hunger that is divine——"

She broke off, for the girl was sobbing. Crumpled on the floor she bent her proud head on the Maid's lap.

"What must I do?" she cried piteously. "The sight of you makes me feel my rottenness. I have been proud of worthless things and I have cherished that wicked pride that I might forget the doubts knocking on my heart.

"You say true. I am not content. I shall never be content. I am most malcontent with myself. Would to God that like you I had been born a peasant!"

The tragic eyes looked up to find the Maid laughing—a kind, gently merriment. Catherine flushed as Jeanne took her tear-stained face in her hands.

"You are foolish, little sister. I would I had been born to your station. My task would have been easier had I been Yoland of Sicily or that daughter of the King of Scots, from whom many looked for the succor of France.

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"Folly, folly! There is no virtue in humble blood. I would I had been a queen! I love fine clothes and rich trappings and the great horse which d'Alençon gave me. God has made a brave world and I would that all His people could get the joy of it. I love it the more because I have only a little time in it."

"But you are happy," said the girl, "and I want such happiness."

"There is no happiness," said the Maid, "save in doing the will of God, our Father."

"But I do not know His will. I am resolved now. I will take the vows and become a religious, and then I shall find peace. I am weary of all this confusing world."

"Foolish one," and Jeanne played with the little curls which strayed around Catherine's ear. "You were not born for a nunnery. Not that way God calls you."

"Show me His way," the girl implored.

"He shows His way privily to each heart, and His ways are many. For some the life of devout contemplation, but not for you, sister. Your blood is too fiery and your heart too passionate. You have a lover? Tell me his name."

Docilely Catherine whispered it, and Jeanne laughed merrily.

"Sir Guy! My most loyal champion. By my staff, you are the blessed maid. There is no more joyous knight in all the fields of France."

"I do not seek wedlock. Oh, it is well for you who are leading armies and doing the commands of God. Something tells me that in marriage I shall lose my soul."

The girl was on her knees with her hands twined.

"Let me follow you," she cried. "I will bring a stout company behind me. Let me ride with you to the freeing of France. I promise to be stalwart."

The Maid shook her head gently.

"Then I take the vows."

The obstinate little mouth had shut and there were no tears now in the eyes.

"Listen, child," and Jeanne took the suppliant hands in hers. "It is true that God has called me to a holy task. He has sent His angels to guide me and they talk with me often. The Lady of Fierbois has given me a mystic sword. I think that in a little while this land will be free again.

"But I shall not see it, for God's promise is clear, and for me it does not give length of days. I did not seek this errand of mine. I resisted the heavenly command, till God was stern with me and I submitted with bitter tears. I shall die a maid, and can never know the blessedness of women. Often at night I weep to think that I shall never hold a babe next my heart."

The face of Jeanne was suddenly strained with a great sadness. It was Catherine's turn to be the comforter. She sat herself beside her and drew her head to her breast.

"For you I see a happier fate—a true man's wife—the mother of sons. Bethink you of the blessedness. Every wife is like the Mother of God—she has the hope of bearing a savior of mankind. She is the channel of the eternal purpose of Heaven. Could I change—could I change? What fortunate wight would envy a poor maid that dwells in the glare of battle? Nay, I do not murmur. I do God's will and rejoice in it. But I am very lonely."

For a little there was silence, an ecstatic silence. Something hard within Catherine melted and she felt a gush of pity. No longer self-pity, but compassion for another. Her heart grew suddenly warm. It was as if a window had been opened in a close room to let in air and landscape.

"I must rest, for there is much ado tomorrow. Will you sleep by me, for I have long been starved of a woman's comradeship."

In the great canopied bed the two girls lay till morning. Once in the darkness Catherine started and found her arms empty. Jeanne was kneeling by the window, her head thrown back and the moonlight on her upturned face. When she woke in the dawn, the Maid was already up, trussing the points of her breeches and struggling with her long boots. She was crooning a verse of a ballad:

"Ser is-je nonette? Crois que non——"

and looking with happy eyes at the cool morning light on the forest.

"Up, sleepy-head," she cried. "Listen to the merry trampling of the horses. I must start, if I would spare the poor things in the noon. Follow me with your prayers, for France rides with me. I love you, sweet sister. Be sure I will hasten to you when my work is done."

So the Maid and her company rode off through the woods to Compiègne and a brooding and silent Catherine took the north road to Picardy.

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THE promise was kept. Once again Catherine saw and had speech of Jeanne. It was nearly two years later, when she sat in a May gloaming in the house of Beaumanoir, already three months a bride.

Much had happened since she had ridden north from the inn at the forest cross-roads. She had summoned de Laval to her side, and the lovers had been reconciled. Her father had died in the Winter and the great fortune and wide manors of the family were now her own. Her lover had fought with Jeanne in the futile battles of the Spring, but he had been far away when in the fatal sortie at Compiègne the Maid was taken by her enemies. All the Summer of that year he had made desperate efforts at rescue, but Jeanne was tight in English hands and presently was in prison at Rouen, awaiting judgment, while her own king and his false councilors stirred not hand or foot to save her. Sir Guy had hurled himself on Burgundy, and with a picked band made havoc of the eastern roads, but he could not break the iron cordon of Normandy. In February they had been wed, but after that, Beaumanoir saw him little, for he was reading Burgundy a lesson in the Santerre.

Catherine sat at home, anxious, tremulous, but happy. A new-made wife lives in a new world, and though at times she grieved for the shame of her land, her mind was too full of housewifely cares and her heart of her husband for long repining.

But often the thought of Jeanne drove a sword into her contentment. So when she lifted her eyes from her embroidery and saw the Maid before her, relief and gladness sent her running to greet her.

Long afterward till she was very old Catherine would tell of that hour. She saw the figure outlined against a window full of the amethyst sky of evening. The white armor and the gay surcoat were gone. Jeanne was still clad like a boy in a coarse gray tunic and black breeches, but her boots did not show any dust of the Summer roads. Her face was very pale, as if from long immurement, and her eyes were no more merry. They shone with a grave ardor of happiness, which checked Catherine's embrace and set her heart beating.

She walked with light steps and kissed the young wife's cheek—a kiss like thistledown.

"You are free?" Catherine stammered.

Her voice seemed to break unwillingly on a holy quiet.

"I am free," the Maid answered. "I have come again to you as I promised. But I can not bide long. I am on a journey."

"You go to the king?" said Catherine.

"I go to my King."

The Maid's hand took Catherine's and her touch was like the fall of gossamer. She fingered the girl's broad ring which had come from distant ancestors, the ring which Sir Aimery of Beaumanoir had worn in the Crusades. She raised it and pressed it to her lips.

Catherine's limbs would not do her bidding. She would fain have risen in a hospitable bustle, but she seemed to be held motionless. Not by fear, but by an exquisite and happy awe. She remembered afterward that from the Maid's rough clothes had come a faint savor of woodsmoke, as from one who had been tending a bonfire in the Autumn stubble.

"God be with you, lady, and with the good knight, your husband. Remember my word to you, that every wife is like Mary the Blessed and may bear a savior of mankind. I see high fortune awaiting your seed. The road is long, but the ways of Heaven are sure."

Catherine stretched out her arms, for a longing so fierce had awoke in her that gave her power to move again. Never in her life had she felt such a hunger of wistfulness.

But Jeanne evaded her embrace. She stood poised as if listening.

"They are calling me. I go. Adieu, sweet sister."

A light shone in her face which did not come from the westering sun. To Catherine there was no sound of voices, but the Maid seemed to hear and answer. She raised her hand as if in blessing and passed out.

Catherine sat long in an entranced silence. Waves of utter longing flowed over her, till she fell on her knees and prayed passionately to her saints, among whom not the least was that gray-tunicked Maid whose eyes seemed doorways into heaven. Her tirewoman found her asleep on her fadstool.

Next morning there came posts to Beaumanoir, men on weary horses with a tragic message. On the day before, in the market-place of Rouen, the chief among the daughters of God had journeyed through the fire to paradise.

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THE WOOD OF LIFE*

The Sixth Tale in the Series "The Path of a King." Each Story Entirely Complete in Itself.

THE lady Catherine de Laval, in her own right Countess of Beaumanoir and mistress of fiefs and manors, rights of chase and warren, mills and hospices, the like of which was not in Picardy, was happy in all things but her family. Her one son had fallen in his youth in an obscure fray in Guienne, leaving two motherless boys who, after her husband's death, were the chief business of life to the Countess Catherine.

The elder, Aimery, grew to manhood after the fashion of the men of her own house, a somewhat heavy country gentleman, much set upon country sports, slow at learning and averse alike to camps and cities. The ambition of the grandmother found nothing to feed upon in the young lord of Beaumanoir. He was kind, virtuous and honest but dull as a pool on a Winter's highway.

Catherine would fain have had the one youth a soldier and the other a saint, and of the two ambitions she most cherished the latter. The first made shipwreck on the rustic Aimery, and therefore the second burned more fiercely. She had the promise from the saints that her line had a great destiny, and the form of it she took to be sanctitude.

For all her married days she had ruled her life according to the canons of God, fasting and praying, cherishing the poor, tending the afflicted, giving of her great wealth bountifully to the church. She had a name for holiness as far as the coasts of Italy. Surely from the blood of Beaumanoir one would arise to be in dark times a defender of the faith, a champion of Christ whom after death the church should accept among the beatified. Such a fate she desired for her seed more hungrily than any emperor's crown.

In the younger, Philip, there was hope. He had been an odd child, slim and pale, while Aimery was large and ruddy, shy where his brother was bold and bold where he was shy. He was backward in games and unready in a quarrel, but it was observed that he had no fear of the dark or of the green lady that haunted the river avenue.

Father Ambrose, his tutor, reported him of quick and excellent parts, but marred by a dreaminess which might grow into *desidia*, that deadly sin. He had a peculiar grace of body and a silken courtesy of manner which won hearts. His gray eyes, even as a small boy, were serious and wise. But he seemed to dwell aloof, and while his brother's moods were plain for all to read, he had from early days a self-control which presented a mask to his little world.

With this stoicism went independence. Philip walked his own way with a gentle obstinacy.

"A saint, maybe," Father Ambrose told his grandmother. "But the kind of saint that the church will ban before it blesses."

To the old dame at Beaumanoir the child was the apple of her eye; and her affection drew from him a tenderness denied to others. But it brought no confidence. The dreaming boy made his own world, which was not, like his grandmother's, one of a dark road visited rarely by angels, with heaven as a shining city at the end of it; or, like his brother's, a green place of earthly jollity. It was as if the Breton blood of the Lavals and Rohans had brought to the solid stock of Beaumanoir the fairy-whimsies of their dim ancestors.

While the moors and woodlands were to Aimery only places to fly a hawk or follow a stag, to Philip they were a wizard land where dreams grew.

And the mysteries of the church were also food for his bold fancy, which by reshaping them stripped them of all terrors. He was extraordinarily happy, for he had the power to make again each fresh experience in a select inner world in which he walked as king, since he was its creator.

He was a child of many fancies, but one especially abode with him. When still very small, he slept in a cot in his grandmother's room, the walls of which were hung with bright tapestry from the Arras looms. One picture caught his eye, for the morning sun struck it, and when he woke early, it glowed invitingly before him.

It represented a little river, twining about a coppice. There was no figure in the piece, which was bounded on one side by a great

*See note to preceding story.

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armoire and on the other by the jamb of the chimney; but from the extreme corner projected the plume of a helmet and the tip of a lance. There was some one there, some one riding toward the trees.

It grew upon Philip that that little wood was a happy place, most happy and desirable. He fancied himself the knight, and he longed to be moving up the links of the stream. He followed every step of the way, across the shallow ford, past the sedges of a backwater, between two clumps of willows and then over smooth green grass to the edge of the wood. But he never tried to picture what lay inside. That was sacred—even from his thoughts.

When he grew older and was allowed to prowl about in the scriptorium of the Abbey of Montmirail, which lay by the Canche side, he found his wood again. It was in a Psaltery, on which a hundred years before some Flemish monk had lavished his gold and vermilion. Opposite the verse of Psalm XXIII, "*In loco pascuæ*" was a picture almost the same as that in the bedroom arras.

There was the river, the meadows and the little wood, painted in colors far brighter than the tapestry. Never was such bloom of green or such depth of blue.

But there was a difference. No lance or plume projected from the corner. The traveler had emerged from cover and was walking waist-deep in the lush grasses. He was a thin nondescript pilgrim, without arms save a great staff like the crozier of a bishop. Philip was disappointed in him and preferred the invisible knight, but the wood was all he had desired. It was indeed a blessed place, and the old scribe had known it, for a scroll of gold hung above it with the words "Sylva Vitæ."

AT THE age of ten the boy had passed far beyond Father Ambrose and was sucking the Abbey dry of its learning, like some second Abelard. In the cloisters of Montmirail were men who had a smattering of the new knowledge, about which Italy had gone mad, and by the munificence of the Countess Catherine copies had been made by the Italian *stationarii* of some of the old books of Rome which the world had long forgotten.

In the abbey library, among a waste of antiphonaries and homilies and monkish chronicles, were to be found texts of Livy and Lucretius and the letters of Cicero. Philip was already a master of Latin, writing it with an elegance worthy of Niccolo the Florentine. At fourteen he entered the College of Robert Sorbonne, but found little charm in its scholastic pedantry. But in the capital he learned the Greek tongue from a Byzantine, the elder Lascaris, and copied in his own hand a great part of Plato and Aristotle. His thirst grew with every draft of the new vintage.

To Pavia he went and sat at the feet of Lorenzo Vallo. The company of Pico della Mirandola at Florence sealed him of the Platonic school, and like his master he dallied with mysteries and had a Jew in his house to teach him Hebrew, that he might find a way of reconciling the Scriptures and the classics, the Jew and the Greek.

From the verses which he wrote at this time, beautifully turned hexameters with a certain Lucretian cadence, it is clear that his mind was like Pico's, hovering about the borderland of human knowledge, clutching at the eternally evasive.

Plato's "Banquet" was his gospel, where the guests of truth did not lack the warmth of desire. Only a fragment remains now of the best of his poems, that which earned the praise of Ficino and the great Lorenzo, and it is significant that the name of the piece was "The Wood of Life."

At twenty Philip returned to Beaumanoir after long wanderings. He was the perfect scholar who had toiled at books and not less at the study of mankind. But his well-knit body and clear eyes showed no marks of bookishness, and Italy had made him a swordsman. A somewhat austere young man, he had kept himself unspotted in the rotting life of the Italian courts, and though he had learned from its suavity, had not lost his simplicity.

But he was more aloof than ever. There was little warmth in the grace of his courtesy, and his eyes were graver than before. It seemed that they had found much, but had had no joy of it, and that they were still craving. It was a disease of the time and men called it *ægritudo*.

"No saint," the aged Ambrose told the countess. "Virtuous, indeed, but not with the virtue of the religious. He will never enter the church. He has drunk at headier streams."

The countess was nearing her end. All her days, for a saint, she had been a

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remarkably shrewd observer of life, but with the weakening of her body's strength she had sunk into the ghostly world which the church devised as an anteroom to immortality.

Her chamber was thronged with lean friars like shadows. To her came the Bishop of Beauvais, once a star of the court but now in his age a grim watch-dog of the truth. To him she spoke of her hopes for Philip.

"An Italianate scholar!" cried the old man. "None such shall pollute the church with my will. They are beguiled by such baubles as the holy St. Gregory denounced *poetarum figmenta sive deliramenta.* If your grandson, *madame,* is to enter the service of God, he must renounce these pagan follies."

The bishop went, but his words remained. In the hour of her extremity the vision of Catherine was narrowed to a dreadful antagonism of light and darkness—God and Antichrist—the narrow way of salvation and a lost world. She was obsessed by the peril of her darling. Her last act must be to pluck him from his temptress. Her mood was fanned by the monks who surrounded her, narrow men whose honesty made them potent.

The wan face on the bed moved Philip deeply. Tenderness filled his heart and a great sense of alienation, for the dying woman spoke a tongue he had forgotten. Their two worlds were divided by a gulf which affection could not bridge. She spoke not with her own voice but with that of her confessors when she pleaded with him to do her wishes.

"I have lived long," she said, "and know that the bread of this world is ashes. There is no peace but in God. You have always been the child of my heart, Philip, and I can not die at ease till I am assured of your salvation. I have the previson that from me a saint shall be born. It is God's plain commandment to you. Obey, and I go to Him with a quiet soul."

For a moment he was tempted. Surely it was a little thing this, to gladden the dying. The rich Abbey of Montmirail was his for the taking, and where would a scholar's life be more happily lived than among its cool cloisters?

A YEAR ago, when he had been in the mood of seeing all contraries but as degrees in an ultimate truth, he might have assented. But in that dim chamber, with burning faces around him and the shadow of death overhead, he discovered in himself a new scrupulousness. It was the case of Esau; he was bidden sell his birthright for pottage, and affection could not gloss over the bargain.

"I have no vocation," he said sadly. "I would fain do the will of God, but God must speak His will to each heart, and He does not speak thus to me."

There was that in the words which woke a far-away memory of her girlhood. Once another in a forest inn had spoken thus to her. She stretched out her hand to him, and he covered it with kisses.

But in the night the priests stirred her fears again, and next morning there was another tragic pleading from which Philip fled almost in tears.

Presently he found himself denied her chamber, unless he could give assurance of a changed mind. And so the uneasy days went on, till in a dawn of wind amid a great praying and chanting the soul of the Countess Catherine passed, and Aimery reigned in Beaumanoir.

The place had grown hateful to Philip, and he made ready to go. For him in his recalcitrancy there was only a younger son's portion, the little seigneury of Eaucourt, which had been his mother's. The good Aimery would have increased the inheritance, but Philip would have none of it. He had made his choice and to ease his conscience must abide strictly by the consequences.

Those days at Beaumanoir had plucked him from his moorings. For the moment the ardor of his quest for knowledge had burned low. He stifled in the air of the North, which was heavy with the fog of a furious ignorance.

But his mind did not turn happily to the trifling of his Italian friends. There was a tragic greatness about such as his grandmother. A salt of nobility which was lacking among the mellow Florentines. Truth, it seemed to him, lay neither with the old church nor the new learning, and not by either way could he reach the desire of his heart.

Aimery bade him a reluctant farewell.

"If you will not keep me company here, I go to the wars. At Beaumanoir I grow fat. Ugh, this business of dying chills me."

And then with a very red face he held out a gold ring.

"Take it, Philip. She cherished it, and

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you were her favorite and should wear it, God knows I have enough."

Likewise he presented him with a little vellum-bound book.

"I found this yesterday, and you being the scholar among us should have it. See, the grandmother's name is written within."

IT WAS a bright May morning when Philip, attended by only two lackeys as became a poor man, rode over the bridge of Canche with eyes turned southward. In the green, singing world the pall lifted from his spirits. The earth which God had made was assuredly bigger and better than man's philosophies.

"It would appear," he told himself, "that like the younger son in the tale I am setting out to look for fortune."

At an inn in the city of Orleans he examined his brother's gift. It was a volume of careful manuscript, entitled *"Imago Mundi"* and bearing the name of one Pierre d'Aily, who had been Bishop of Cambray when the Countess Catherine was a child. He opened it and read of many marvels—how the world was round, as Pythagoras held, so that if a man traveled west, he would come in time to Asia, where the sun rose.

Philip brooded over the queer pages, letting his fancy run free, for he had been so wrapped up in the mysteries of man's soul that he had forgotten the mysteries of the earth, which is that soul's place of pilgrimage.

He read of cities with silver walls and golden towers waiting on the discoverer and of a river on which banks *"virescit sylva vitæ."* And at that phrase he fell to dreaming of his childhood, and a pleasant unrest stirred in his heart.

"Aimery has given me a precious viaticum," he said.

HE TRAVELED by slow stages into Italy, for he had no cause for haste. He was busy at the long task of discovering his soul. At Pavia he wandered listlessly among the lecture-halls. What had once seemed to him the fine gold of eloquence was now only leaden rhetoric. In his lodging at Florence he handled once again his treasures—his books from Ficino's press, his manuscripts, some from Byzantium, yellow with age, some on clean white vellum, new-copied by his order; his busts and gems and intaglios. What had become of that fervor with which he had been used to gaze on them? What of that delicious world into which with drawn curtains and a clear lamp he could retire at will? The brightness had died in their air.

He found his friends very full of quarrels. There was a mighty feud between two of them on the respective merits of Cicero and Quintilian as law-givers in grammar, and the air was thick with libels. Another pair wrangled in public over the preeminence of Scipio and Julius Cæsar; others on narrow points of Latinity.

There was a feud among the Platonists on a matter of interpretation, in which already stilettos had been drawn. More bitter still was the strife about mistresses—kitchen-wenches and courtesans, where one scholar stole shamelessly from the other and decked with names like Lesbia and Erinna.

Philip sickened at what he had before tolerated, for he had brought back with him from the North a quickened sense of sin. Maybe the Bishop of Beauvais had been right. What virture was there in this new knowledge if its prophets were apes and satyrs! Not here grew the wood of life. Priapus did not haunt its green fringes.

His mind turned toward Venice. There the sea was and there men dwelt with eyes turned to spacious and honorable quests, not to monkish hells and heavens or inward to unclean hearts. And in Venice in a tavern off the Merceria he spoke with destiny.

It was a warm evening, and, having dined early, he sought the balcony which overlooked the canal. It was empty but for one man who sat at a table with a spread of papers before him on which he was intently engaged. Philip bade him good evening, and a face was raised which promptly took his fancy. The stranger wore a shabby gray doublet, but he had no air of poverty, for round his neck hung a massive chain of gold, and his broad belt held a richly chased dagger.

He had unbuckled his sword and it lay on the table, holding down certain vagrant papers which fluttered in the evening wind. His face was hard and red like sandstone, and around his eyes were a multitude of fine wrinkles.

It was these eyes that arrested Philip. They were of a pale brown as if bleached by weather and gazing over vast space—cool

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and quiet and friendly, but with a fire burning at the back of them.

The man assessed Philip at a glance, and then, as if liking what he found in him, smiled so that white furrows appeared in his tanned cheeks. With a motion of his hand he swept aside his papers and beckoned the other to sit with him. He called on the drawer to bring a flask of Cyprus.

"I was about to have my evening draft," he said. "Will you honor me with your company, sir?"

The voice was so pleasant that Philip, who was in a mood to shun talk, could not refuse. He sat down by the board, and moved aside a paper to make room for the wine. He noticed that it was a map.

The Bishop of Cambray had made him curious about such things. He drew it to him and saw that it was a copy of Andrea Bianco's chart, drawn nearly half a century before, showing the Atlantic Sea with a maze of islands stretching westward.

The other shook his head.

"A poor thing and out of date. Here—" and he plucked a sheet from below the rest—"here is a better, which Fra Mauro of this city drew for the great prince, Henry of Portugal."

Philip looked at a map which showed a misshapen, sprawling Africa, but with a clear ocean way round the south of it. His interest quickened. He peered at the queer shapes in the dimming light.

"Then there is a way to the Indies by sea?"

"Beyond doubt. I myself have turned the butt of Africa—if these matters interest you. But the thought of that dry land has given me an African thirst. *Hé*, drawer!"

He filled his glass from a fresh bottle.

" 'Twas in June four years back. I was in command of a caravel in the expedition of Diaz. The court of Lisbon had a fit of cold ague and we sailed with little good-will; therefore it was our business to confound the doubters or perish.

"Already our seamen had reached the mouth of that mighty river they called the Congo, and clearly the butt of Africa could not be distant. We had the course of Cam and Behaim to guide us thus far, but after that was the darkness."

The man's face had the intent look of one who remembers with passion. He told of the struggle to cross the Guinea Deep instead of hugging the shore; of blue idle days of calm when magic fish flew aboard and Leviathan wallowed so near that the caravels were all but overwhelmed by the wave of him; of a storm which swept the decks and washed away the Virgin at the bows of the admiral's ship; of landfall at last in a place where the forests were knee-deep in a muddy sea, strange forests where the branches twined like snakes; of a going ashore at a river-mouth full of toothed serpents and giant apes, and of a fight with Behemoth among the reeds.

Then a second storm, blowing from the east, had flung them seaward, and for weeks they were out of sight of land, steering by strange stars. They had their magnets and astrolabes, but it was a new world they had entered, and they trusted God rather than their wits. At last they turned eastward.

"What distance before the turn?" Philip asked.

"I know not. We were far from land, and no man can measure a course on water."

"Nay, but the ancients could," Philip cried, and he explained how the Romans had wheels of a certain diameter fixed to their ship's sides, which the water turned in its passing and which flung for each revolution a pebble into a tally-box.

The other's eyes widened.

"A master device! I would hear more of it. What a thing it is to have learning! We had only the hour-glass and guesswork."

Then he told how on a certain day the crews would go no farther, being worn out by storms, for in those seas the tides were like cataracts and the waves were mountains. The admiral, Bartholomew Diaz, was forced to put about with a heavy heart, for he believed that a little way to the east he should find the southern cape of Africa. He steered west by north, looking for no land till Guinea was sighted.

"But on the second morning we saw land to the northward, and following it westward, came to a mighty cape so high that the top was in the clouds. There was such a gale from the east that we could do no more than gaze on it as we scudded past. Presently, still keeping land in sight, we were able to bend north again, and when we came into calm water, we captains went aboard the admiral's ship and knelt and gave thanks to God for His mercies. For we, the first of mortals, had rounded the butt of Africa and prepared the sea-road to the Indies."

"A vision maybe."

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"Nay, it was no vision. I returned there under mild skies, when it was no longer a misty rock but a green mountain. We landed and set up a cross and ate the fruits and drank the water of the land. Likewise we changed its name from the Cape of Storms, as Diaz had dubbed it, to the *Bona Esperanza*, for indeed it seemed to us the hope of the world."

"And beyond it?"

"Beyond it we found a pleasant country and would doubtless have made the Indies, if our ships had not grown foul and our crews mutinous from fear of the unknown. It is clear to me that we must establish a port of victualing in that southern Africa before we can sail the last stage of Cathay."

THE man spoke modestly and simply, as if he were talking of a little journey from one village to another. Something in his serious calm powerfully caught Philip's fancy. In all his days he had never met such a one.

"I have not your name, signor," he said. "They call me Battista de Cosca, a citizen of Genoa, but these many years a wanderer. And yours?"

Philip gave it and the stranger bowed. The de Lavals were known as a great house far beyond the confines of France.

"You contemplate another voyage?"

The brown man nodded.

"I am here on the quest of maps, for these Venetians are the princes of map-making. Then I sail again."

"To Cathay?"

A sudden longing had taken Philip. It was as if a bright, strange world had been spread before him, compared with which the old was tarnished and dingy.

Battista shook his head.

"Not Cathay. To go there would be only to make assurance of that which we already know. I have shown the road; let others plan its detail and build hostelries. For myself I am for a bolder venture."

The balcony was filling up. A noisy group of young men were chattering at one table, and at others some of the merchants from the Merceria were at wine. But where the two sat it was quiet and dusky, though without on the canal the sky made a golden mirror.

Philip could see his companion's face in the reflected light, and it reminded him of the friars who had filled the chamber of his dying grandmother. It was strained with a steadfast ardor, a burning resolution.

Battista leaned his elbows on the board and his eyes searched the other's.

"I am minded to open my heart to you," he said. "You are young and of a noble stock. Likewise you are a scholar. I am on a mission, Sir Philip—the loftiest, I think, since Moses led Israel over the deserts. I am seeking a promised land. Not Cathay, but a greater. I sail presently, not the African seas, but the Sea of Darkness, the Mare Atlanticum."

He nodded toward Bianco's map.

"I am going beyond the Ultimate Islands."

"Listen," he went on, and his voice fell very low and deep. "I take it we live in these latter days of which the prophets spoke. I remember a monk in Genoa who said that the Blessed Trinity ruled in turn, and that the reign of the Father was accomplished, and that of the Son nearing its close; and that now the reign of the Spirit was at hand. It may have been heresy—I am no scholar—but he pointed a good moral. 'For,' said he, 'the old things pass away and the boundaries of the world are shifting. Here in Europe we have come to knowledge of salvation and brought the soul and mind of men to an edge and brightness like a sword. Having perfected the weapon, it is now God's will that we enter into possession of the new earth which He had kept hidden against this day, and He has sent His Spirit like a wind to blow us into those happy spaces.'

"Now, mark you, sir, this earth is not a flat plain surrounded by outer darkness, but a sphere hung in the heavens and sustained by God's hand. Therefore if a man travel east or west, he will, if God prosper him, return in time to his starting-point."

The speaker looked at Philip as if to invite contradiction, but the other nodded.

"It is the belief of the best sailors," Battista went on. "It is the belief of the great Paolo Toscanelli in this very land of Italy."

"It was the belief of a greater than he. The ancients——"

"Aye, what of your ancients?" Battista asked eagerly.

Philip responded with a scholar's zest.

"Four centuries before our Lord's birth Aristotle taught the doctrine, from observing in different places the rise and setting of the heavenly bodies. The sages Eratosthenes,

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Hipparchus and Ptolemy amplified the teaching. It is found in the poetry of Manilino and Seneca, and it was a common thought in the minds of Virgil and Ovid and Pliny. You will find it in St. Augustine and St. Isidore and Beda and in many of the moderns. I have little knowledge of such things, but on the appeal to high authority your doctrine succeeds."

"What a thing is learning!" Battista exclaimed with reverence. "Here have I and such as I been fumbling in the dark when the great ones of old saw clearly. It follows, then, that a voyage westward will bring a man to Cathay?"

"Assuredly. But how will he return? If the earth is a sphere, his course will be a descent, and on his way back he will have to climb a great steep of waters."

"It is not so," said Battista vigorously. "Though why it is not so I can not tell. Traveling eastward by land there is no such descent, and in this Mediterranean Sea of ours one can sail as easily from Cadiz to Egypt as from Egypt to Cadiz. There is a divine alchemy in it which I can not fathom, but the fact stands."

"Then you would reach Cathay by the west?"

"Not Cathay."

The man's voice was very earnest.

"There is a land between us and Cathay, a great island—land beyond the Seven Cities of Antillia."

"Cipango," said Philip, who had read Marco Polo's book in the Latin version published a year or two before.

"Nay, not Cipango. On this side Cipango. Of Cipango the Venetians have told us much, but the land I seek is not Cipango."

He drew closer to Philip and spoke low.

"There was a Frenchman, a Rochellois—he is dead these ten years—but I have spoken with him. He was whirled west by storms far beyond Antillia and was gripped by a great ocean-stream and carried to land. What think you it was? No less than Hy-Brasil. There he found men, broad-faced dusky men with gentle souls, and saw such miracles as have never been vouchsafed to mortals.

" 'Twas not Cipango or Cathay, for there were no emperors or cities, but a peaceful race dwelling in innocence. The land was like Eden, bringing forth fine harvests in the year, and vines and all manner of fruits grew without tillage. Tortorel was the man's name and some thought him mad, but I judged differently, I have talked with him and I have copied his charts. I go to find those Fortunate Islands."

"Alone?"

"I have friends. There is a man of my own city—Cristoforo Colombo, they call him. He is a hard man and a bitter, but a master seaman, and there is a fire in him that will not be put out. And there may be others."

His steadfast burning eyes held Philip's.

"And you—what do you seek?" he asked.

PHILIP was aware that he had come to a cross-roads in life. The easy path he had planned for himself was barred by his own nature. Something of his grandmother's blood clamored within him for a sharper air than the well-warmed chamber of the scholar. This man, chance-met in a tavern, had revealed to him his own heart.

"I am looking for the Wood of Life," he said simply and was amazed at his words.

Battista stared at him with open mouth, and then plucked feverishly at his doublet. From an inner pocket he produced a packet rolled in fine leather and shook papers on the table. One of these was a soiled and worn slip of parchment, covered with an odd design.

"Look," he said hoarsely. "Tortorel's map!"

It showed a stretch of country, apparently a broad valley running east to a seashore. Through it twined a river and on both sides were hills dotted with trees. The center seemed to be meadows, sown with villages and gardens. In one crook of the stream lay a little coppice on which many roads converged, and above it was written the words "Sylva Vitæ."

"It is the finger of God," said Battista. "Will you join me and search out this wood of life?"

At that moment there was a bustle at the door giving on the main room of the tavern. Lights were being brought in and a new company were entering. They talked in high-pitched, affected voices and giggled like *bona-robas*. There were young men with them, dressed in the height of fashion; a woman or two, and a man who, from the richness of his dress, seemed to be one of the princely merchants who played Mæcenas to the new learning.

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But what caught Philip's sight was a little group of Byzantines who were the guests of honor. They wore fantastic headdresses and long female robes, above which their flowing dyed beards and their painted eyebrows looked like masks of carnival time. After Battista's gravity their vain eyes and simpering tones seemed an indecent folly. These were the folk he had called friends, this the life he had once cherished. Assuredly he was well rid of it.

He grasped Battista's hands.

"I will go with you," he said, "over the edge of the world."

WAS IT happened, Philip de Laval did not sail with Columbus in that first voyage which brought him to San Salvador in the Bahamas. But he and Battista were in the second expedition, when the ship under the command of the latter was separated by a storm from her consorts and driven on a westerly course when the others had turned south. It was believed to be lost, and for two years nothing was heard of its fate.

At the end of that time a tattered little vessel reached Bordeaux, and Philip landed on the soil of France. He had a strange story to tell. The ship had been caught up by a current which had borne it north for the space of fifteen days, till landfall was made on the coast of what we now call South Carolina. There it had been beached in an estuary, while the crew adventured inland.

The land was rich enough, but the tribes were not the gentle race of Battista's imagining. There had been a savage struggle for mastery till the strangers made alliances and were granted territory between the mountains and the sea. But they were only a handful, and Philip was sent back for further colonists and for a cargo of arms and seeds and implements.

The French court was in no humor for his tale, being much involved in their own wars. It may be that he was not believed; anyhow he got no help from his king. At his own cost and with the aid of friends he fitted out his ship for the return.

After that the curtain falls. It would appear that the colony did not prosper, for it is on record that Philip in the year 1521 was living at his house of Eaucourt, a married man, occupied with books and the affairs of his little seigneury. A portrait of him still extant by an Italian artist shows a deeply furrowed face and stern brows, as of one who had endured much, but the eyes are singularly quiet and happy. It is believed that in his last years he was one of the first of the gentlemen of Picardy to adhere to the reformed faith.

HOW AN INDIAN TRADES

by **E. A. Brininstool**

THE plains Indian of fifty years ago was a peculiar individual. If he saw anything that took his fancy he must obtain it in some manner.

In 1867, when Col. Richard I. Dodge commanded Fort Sedgwick, this was well illustrated. An Indian came to the fort with a very beautiful buffalo robe, elaborately decorated in all the best Indian style. Many of the officers at the fort tried in vain to purchase it, offering goods to the extent of twenty dollars, but all offers were refused.

Later a sergeant passed the Indian, having in his hand a little bag of cube sugar, something new and novel to the Indian in those days. The man handed a few lumps of this novel form of sugar to the Indian and passed on.

Soon the Indian came running after the sergeant, took the robe from his shoulders and offered to exchange it for the sack of sugar. The trade was quickly made, whereupon the Indian sat down on the ground and deliberately ate up every lump.

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By Walter Millis

Author of "The Second Mate."

WHEN a man follows the sea he gets no right view about things of this sort. But on that evening I knew that I was in love. We were sailing in the morning and as I picked my way down among the docks it seemed somehow to be almost a new sort of world that I was walking through. You know how a coal-dock is at night. There is nothing particularly pretty about it. But for some reason I thought that there was, then.

The great bins stood up so big and black above me, and everything was so still. Away behind me in the coal-yard an arc-light was guttering to itself, throwing shadows through the trestlework like a crazy moon in an awkward forest. I stumbled over the tracks in the darkness and against a pile of old junk, and then I came out on the stringer-piece beside the ship.

The tide had just turned on the flood and there was a smell of dried seaweed on the air, all mixed up with the smells of rotting wood and engine oil. Outside the wind was rising, and the dirty harbor-water came up and slapped at the piling. Everything was deathly still except for that and for the low noise of the dynamos in the engine-room humming to themselves.

I stopped on the stringer and leaned against a mooring-post. Presently the chief came through—a big, heavy, fat man, he was, but he had quick eyes and was one of the best engineers in the whole merchant marine. He stopped a minute on the gang-plank when he saw me.

"Is that you, Harris?" he asked. "Has Flint come on board yet?"

Flint was the second assistant engineer, you see; I was the first. I told the chief that I had just come down myself and he muttered something like an oath and went on up and disappeared aft. And then the clouds that were driving fast across the sky suddenly broke away, and the moon shone out and glittered on the running water beyond the pier-head and silvered the mast-heads and the funnel and the tops of the bins. Then it was that everything that had passed for me that day seemed to gather up, all at once, if you know what I mean—it is very hard to explain, although I suppose it doesn't make much difference—and resolve itself into the wildness and beauty of that night. Then it was that I felt that there was something there which I had never seen before.

I went back in my mind over the last two days. This was in 1917, just after we had gone to war, and the ship was being worked so hard that two days was all the shore-leave I could get. It was not even until the second afternoon that I thought to go around and call on Lucy.

You don't know her, of course. Probably you will never set eyes upon her. And so it is hard for me to give you to understand about her. But you know how it is in these little New England seaside villages.

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We had played with each other since we were kids. We all used to tag around together on the green or sail dories in the harbor when we got older.

I thought of her like a sister, with about as much attention as young fellows ever give to their sisters, I suppose. Then afterward I went up to a mill in Fall River and then I went to sea and I didn't get back very often; and when I did sometimes I wouldn't happen to see her at all. Then on this afternoon I just went up on the porch, where the light was lying all greenish and warm, shining through the wisteria vines, and she came to the door. Well, it is hard to say.

She just stood there for a minute, and—and I saw that she was not a girl any longer. You know how an engine acts when you are working the water out of the low-pressure cylinder? You put over the link and the huge cranks just go down once, like that, and back again, without a sound, as if they were no heavier than a feather when you know that they weigh half a ton apiece.

Something like that happened inside of me all at once as I looked at her gray eyes. It was silent, and powerful.

"How are you, Lucy?" I said.

And I knew in a second that it was a vain and silly thing to say, just as I knew that everything in the world which I might say to her forever afterward would sound vain and silly before those eyes of hers.

There was no question about any of it. I realized that something new had come, suddenly, at once, as an accident comes upon you at sea. And I accepted it, just as I would have to accept an accident. . . . I didn't stay long; I couldn't. I had to get away to think. And so, when I had come back that evening, and was leaning against the mooring-post and watching the moon break out over the harbor and over all the dirt and blackness of the coal-dock behind me, I felt at last that I had in some way stumbled into a new kind of world that was very wonderful indeed and everlasting. The more fool I.

IT WAS then that I heard a man in the trestle-work behind me. He came on uncertainly for a few steps and knocked against something and fell down, swearing thickly. He got up presently, and seemed to make better weather of it, and then he struck into a quavering song with obscene words.

It was Flint, drunk, as he always was on the last night in port. I was utterly disgusted. I didn't want to think about that sort of thing just then. It was a kind of shock, like cold water. He came on and fell heavily against the rail of the gang-plank.

"For ——'s sake, Flint," I said, "pull yourself together and shut up that —— nonsense. You'll fall into the slip."

"Eh, Harris," he said. "'Lo, Harris. You're —— fine fellow, Harris, if you only didn't think so yourself."

And he put his arm around my neck. I was thoroughly ashamed. Flint came from a place about three miles up the coast from my own town. I had known him slightly for a long time; he had been in the mill with me and it was I that had got him his job in this ship. That was when officers were very scarce and we were so hard up that we would take anything, as the chief said, just to fill up the ship's papers.

He was no good; we all thought him no good but we had to keep him. When he was sober, he did his work well enough. He was a little man, all pinched and dried up from the heat of the boilers and ordinarily he was somber and self-contained. Now, as his head hung vacantly at my shoulder, looking in the moonlight like a ghastly mask of some sort, I almost shuddered with loathing.

"This is a fine way to come aboard," I said.

He leered at me atrociously. "Wine an' women, Harris; wine an' women, you know. But I guess I'm not the only one, eh?"

He laughed stupidly and made a feeble effort to nudge me in the ribs.

"You're quiet all right, but you ain't above 'em yourself. Good for you, ol' boy! Didn't know you had it in you."

"What are you talking about?"

"Eh, I saw you," he said. "Lucy's some chicken, too, ain't she? Didn't notice little Flint down the road when you came out, did you? But he was there all right. Yah!"

For a minute I thought that I was going to push him over the stringer. Then he suddenly collapsed and hung about my neck like a filthy rag of some sort. The clouds drove by in the heavens and put out the moon. Even then it seemed to me that we were standing like lost creatures at the

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bottom of a vast pit, Flint and I, and Flint hanging about my neck.

I don't know; fancies are strange things, sometimes. I lugged him up the plank and put him in his berth and then stepped out on deck to get the smell of the drink out of my nostrils. The flitting moon was paler in the west, and there was the ghost of a red blush on the clouds behind the coal-bins. It was later than I had thought and I went into the engine-room to look about before starting.

In a little while the chief came down and I told him about the second assistant.

"Let him lie," he said contemptuously.

We were used to his ways by this time and we got steam and turned over the engines without him. The ship was well down the harbor, and the big cross-heads had settled into their steady rhythm, when Flint finally came on to the grating to relieve me. He said nothing, but glanced at the gages and the revolution counter.

Little, his lips closed tightly, his shoulders stooping and his head thrust forward a trifle, he seemed, in his greasy overalls and broken peaked cap, like any of the hundreds of silent, capable men that you find in the engine-rooms of merchant ships. But I still burned with the shame of what had happened the night before.

"Well," I said, and I suppose that I was savage about it, "are you sober enough to do your work yet?"

Most men would have flown out in a passion at that. But he only looked at me sidewise, quickly, as if to shield himself from a whip. "Don't talk to me that way, Harris," he said in a subdued voice. "You don't understand a fellow."

I thought he was only being cowardly, and I was angry with him.

"It's a fine thing to come aboard in that shape when it may be your last trip this side of the water!"

"You mean the submarines," he said and, though he tried to look big, I saw that he was frightened. His mouth worked just a little. I was very scornful of him. But I don't know about him now. It's not always easy to tell.

"She's a rotten old tub," he went on, and not in the tone that people generally use when they talk about their ship that way. "If anything happens, we haven't got a show, not down here."

It is true that she was an old boat, resurrected, —— knows where from, when shipping got so scarce. When we first came aboard of her, the engines ran as if they would jump off the bed-plates. The chief had fixed most of that, but you could still see that she had been built in the eighties.

"Yes, and if it's any comfort to you," I told him, "the boilers aren't exactly perfect even yet. You might just keep your eye on them."

That was quite true. She didn't have Scotch boilers, but some patent water-tube contraptions of the sort they used to like experimenting with in the old days. They were fit only for a yacht, if they were fit for anything. The voyage home they had given trouble, and we had spent most of the time while the ship was loading in crawling around inside of them trying to patch them up. We ought to have had a new set but there wasn't any time for that. The chief said they would stand, but I knew that was only because in the way we were fixed then they had to.

"I'll watch them," said Flint, and shut his mouth and went away. I climbed on the deck.

THE air was fresh and cool and the steamer was beginning to dip a little in the off-shore swell. Behind us the land was already falling into the haze. Looking at the great gray ocean coming up out of the horizon at us, I felt that this voyage was going to be different from any that I had ever sailed before.

To begin with, it was my first since war had been declared, and the big American flag that we had carried on the bows had been painted out under a fresh coat of blue-gray that covered the whole ship from stem to stern, deck-houses, funnel and all. There was something very solemn about that. I had never thought much about submarines before; of course, there was always the risk but a marine engineer lives his whole life more or less in the middle of risks and he learns to take things more or less as they come.

I had only talked about it in the engine-room to scare Flint. But now as I stopped a minute by the rail, with the smell of the deep sea strong on the air, there was something that suddenly made me afraid to go out of life just then. It was foolish, of course; perhaps cowardly. But I thought that life had begun to mean more to me

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than it ever had before, and I wanted it, you see, to do things with.

I would hate to have any sneaking U-boat cheat me out of it just at that time. Rather abject, in a way perhaps. But there were Lucy's gray eyes and golden hair floating before me in the flying spindrift flung back from the bows. I felt as if I could do anything and everything in the world, if the chance were only granted.

One chance did come, too, in a way that I had not expected. I think now that the strangest part of the whole wretched business was that it should have been Flint who had the idea first. On that ship the first and second assistants had a cabin together. I never said very much to Flint, partly because I despised him a good deal, and partly because he himself, when he was sober, was so silent a man. But once, when I was going off watch, he stopped me.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I'd like to show you something."

I was puzzled at what it could be, but turned and followed him to the engine-room work-bench. He pulled out some loose ends of paper, with rough pencil-drawings all over them, and spread them before me, looking at me sidewise in the way he always did, as if he were a little afraid of me and a little ashamed of himself, perhaps, and yet would have been glad if we had been better friends. I never quite understood that look of his. I think maybe that he just wanted a bit of ordinary sympathy, but you don't waste much time with sympathy as a rule on shipboard.

"You know more about this stuff than I do, Harris," he said. "Thought maybe you would help me out."

"What is it?"

"It's just an idea of mine," he answered. "For a new design of pipe-union for water-tube boilers."

I stared at him in utter astonishment; I had never known that he had any turn toward inventions. He sensed my surprize.

"It was these old tea-kettles we have that made me think of it. There's no union made now that will stand up properly in a water-tube boiler. I tell you, Harris, I don't like traveling around over those old things. In boilers as old as that, you can't tell when somethin's going to let go, and then there'd be —— to pay. I was thinking about it the other day and I had an idea. But I can't get it worked out."

He pointed to the drawings. I picked them up, but I was too full of my own amazement to look at them at first. The man was afraid, so afraid that he had set himself to invent a better union! It would never have come into my head to do a thing like that. I did not understand it at all. If old unions begin to leak, why, that's just the way old unions are, and it's up to the engineer to watch out for them. But this man had invented a new kind! My contempt for him was just as strong as ever but I wondered at him a little too.

Then I began to examine his sketches. I saw the idea at once, but I realized that Flint didn't have the least notion of what he was about. He was a poor engineer, and he could no more do practical designing work than he could stay sober on the last night in port. And in a simple thing of that sort, the practical design counts for everything. I sat down at the bench.

"Do you think it's good?" he asked anxiously.

I faced him squarely. On that voyage I was feeling tremendously sure of myself, you see.

"Look here, Flint," I told him, "this business as it stands is a clever idea and that's all it is. You won't make anything out of it in a thousand years this way, but I think I can. I tell you what. Let me take these sketches and work on them and we'll patent it and split the profits. Will you do that?"

I didn't like the man but I didn't think I I was taking any advantage of him. I felt honestly that my help would be worth as much as half. But the curious part was that he seemed to think the same. He raised no objection at all, as you might expect a man to do.

"All right, Harris," he said. "We'll call it a bargain."

I WORKED like a dog over that pipe-union. I had pottered about machinery almost all my life and I knew something about design, but I had never tried before to work out anything like that myself. And it was hard, too; the thing wouldn't come just right no matter how much I tried.

On the voyage before I think that I would have given it up on the first day. But on this voyage I wouldn't give it up. You may say that I had silly notions in my head

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but I don't think so. It was not altogether for the money that there might be in it, although I really began to want money then for the first time. No, it wasn't the money. I tried to think it out sometimes when I was on watch, with the engines beating steadily away below and the smell of steam and hot metal and engine-oil coming up all warm through the gratings underfoot. But it's hard to explain. You see, it was because of Lucy. Don't laugh. I wanted to do something, anything, more than just my ordinary work. I can't tell you how much I felt that I must make this thing go.

Well, I did, finally. It wouldn't have been hard for one of these college graduates, I suppose, once he had the idea, but I took a lot of pride in it. I made up my final sketches toward the end of the home voyage. We had heavy weather coming back and I tell you it's no fun trying to make neat drawings with a ruler and a pair of compasses on the back of an old leather suitcase spread across your knees, especially when the ship is rolling twenty degrees each way.

But I got it drawn up, and printed down at the bottom "The Flint-Harris Self-Packing Union." It went against the grain a little putting his name on it at all, for it seemed to have come so much to be my work, but of course I had to. When I went over it with him, he didn't say much. But after I had explained what I had done, he looked at it as if he were thinking of something else.

"You think it's worth while?" he asked.

"It's better than anything of the sort that I have ever seen," I told him and I believed it.

"Then we'll make money out of this."

"We ought to make a whole lot. It's simple as can be to turn out and it won't only be good for marine boilers, either. Any sort of steam-fitting work can use it."

"——, but that's good!" he exclaimed. "I could stand a little extra cash myself just about now." His face had flashed up in a queer sort of way when he said that, but the next minute it fell back again into the same old expression.

"When we get in," I said, "you can carry this stuff to a patent lawyer and have him fix it up. I guess you can get leave all right."

Flint looked at me solemnly.

"You'd better do it; you know more about that sort of business."

I remembered then that when he was ashore Flint wasn't always to be trusted. I had planned to spend what shore-leave I might have in a different way than fussing around with patent lawyers. But it wouldn't be right to take any chances with him, so it was agreed that I should attend to the patent.

But as it turned out we had more time than I thought, because we lost a couple of days waiting for cargo. I saw to our invention, and after I had finished the business I found that I could still get down home for an afternoon. All the way on the train my head kept filling up with stupid fancies, like any kid's. I stopped at Lucy's house even before I went to my mother's.

When I saw the porch, looking all sleepy and quiet behind its vines in the shade of the big elm in the yard, would you believe it, my heart began to beat a little faster. But then it stopped quickly because I came nearer and recognized Lucy sitting there—with Flint!

When I left he was still there, for you understand that I did not stay long. He was with me in the late train, going back; I saw him as I passed through the smoker. He didn't see me, however, and I gave up the idea of a pipe and went into another car. I could not see any reason why he should have been there with her.

And early in the morning he came aboard very drunk indeed and roaring all kinds of dirty things. It was hard to believe that this was the same person and harder still next day when he came about his work without a word to any one. I thoroughly despised the man, but I puzzled over him more than before.

ALL the rest of that year and through the next Spring it was the same way. We were pretty regularly on the European run, and had several brushes with U-boats, but never anything very close. And at those times Flint was never worth a snap of the fingers.

I have seen him stand on the grating and grip a hand-rail so hard that the veins over his knuckles would swell out blue under the grease, all to keep his knees from shaking with fear. Even the oilers used to sneer at him behind his back for it. So did I; but now, I'm not sure. I've known men who

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wouldn't care whether their knees shook or not. And whenever we were on this side and I would get a chance to run down home, I would find him there too, or else just coming or just leaving.

He never went to his own town, although as I said, it was only a little way up the coast. It began to get on my nerves after a while. If he had been any decent sort of fellow, straight and open and the ordinary kind, things would have been a lot different. But as it was, I didn't know what ground I was standing on.

Then, too, there was this affair of our union that was coming along. We got the patent on it all right, and when I showed it to the chief he looked it over and said:

"I only wish I had the rights to that gage. You can sell the thing for a whole lot, without stirring a finger."

I think it was what the chief said more than anything else which made me act as I did. Even with the pay that marine engineers get now, a first's job on a tramp isn't exactly gilt-edged. But this looked like something big, and it made me feel a lot of confidence in myself.

The money in it, too, would put me in a surer position, don't you see? And this man Flint nearly drove me crazy. I've lain awake through half a watch below, with nothing but the sound of the splashing sea and the beating engines in my ears, and tried just to get the fellow out of my head. But I couldn't, and every voyage it was worse. I don't believe I ever forgot about Lucy and I could not think of her without remembering this cursed Flint. You don't know how it was with Flint living in the same cabin with me. It just came at last so that I could not stand it any longer. There seemed to be only one worth-while thing in all the world, and it was Lucy. In the end I decided I would not go on like that any more.

IT WAS August when I finally went down there with this in my mind. I had never seen her look so beautiful as she did on that long afternoon. But no matter about that part—it's of no consequence. I asked her to go out for a walk with me and we skirted along by the cliffs, where the surf booms in down the shingle away below, and the hot countryside lies behind you with the bees humming in the bayberry bushes.

We hardly said anything, I believe. As I walked by her side there was too much of a turmoil in my head. I did not know what I was about very well; I felt that I did not even know Lucy, nor what sort of a man this Flint was. But one thing I was sure of: that I loved her very deeply indeed.

We sat down finally, in a grassy place where the cliff-edge had been broken away, and I asked her squarely and frankly as I could whether she would be my wife. She turned her fine gray eyes upon me, arched in surprize.

"To marry you? But—but—I couldn't do that, you know!"

"Then it is Flint?" I asked her.

She rose at that and turned on me.

"What do you mean?" she said, but not, as I think back on it now, angrily. "You haven't any right to ask me such a thing!"

That was all there was to it. Crazy, wasn't I? But it seemed like the end of everything—flat, empty, nothing left. I remember now how the one wave sounded which broke just then on the beach far down below us. It was so still I could hear the pebbles rattling back over the shingle. Then another wave broke.

"So it is Flint," I said, rather stupidly.

She opened her lips as if she were going to speak but she made no answer at all. I wonder, what would it have been? But I didn't stop to think about that; I was so full of my own ideas. We walked back to the house, a little hurriedly, in silence. On the porch I saw Flint waiting for her.

Perhaps you will say that it was jealousy but I do not believe so. It has always seemed to me that nothing is so contemptible and I have done my best to steer an honest course. I do not think that I was jealous but it seemed to me there was something awful about the idea of Lucy's even wasting two thoughts on such a man as this Flint was.

How is a woman who stays at home and sees us only when we are on our best behavior to know anything about men like Flint? There was something almost treacherous in it. Lucy meant a great deal to me and if I were to be indifferent to her happiness just because I could never share in it, would not that make me out to be a pretty poor sort of man? For myself, I swear to you, I had no thought.

After that day on the cliffs everything was over for me, past. But when I came

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back on board ship and saw Flint always about, it made me feel as if I wanted to cry out. It would have done no good to fight him. It was not his fault. But the affair ought to have been stopped; I dug my nails into my hands sometimes with the absolute horror of the thought that Lucy would be blind enough to give herself to that weakling. It was unendurable.

Perhaps, after all, it was Fate which was making of me an instrument. For if it had not been for accidents, nothing of this sort would have happened. The third day out the chief slipped on a ladder when the ship rolled suddenly, and he was in his bunk for the rest of the voyage. This put me in charge of the engine-room. And then too it was really only accident that we should fall in with a submarine.

I was taking a cat-nap in my berth when the boy rapped on the door and warned me. I hurried below. It is the rule of course for every one to stand by when the ship is attacked. I sent Flint into the boiler-room to look after the firing. I thought for a moment that he would not go, for if a ship is torpedoed it is ten chances to one against anybody in the stoke-hole.

His face was pale but he knew that there was no fooling to be done then, and he went down the ladder and disappeared amid all the flying machinery that glittered down there under the electrics. I leaned against the rail of the starting platform, with the link and the main-steam ready under my hand.

Of course I was excited. There is a kind of tenseness in every one at a time like that. It is not as if you were up on the bridge, where you can see everything that is happening; you can tell nothing except by the feel of the ship, and you do not know at what instant the whole side of the boat may be blown in upon you.

It is not a nice sensation, this waiting buried in an engine-room. You do not have to be a coward to feel your throat getting dry and watch your hand opening and shutting of itself. But you must keep your head. The oilers, if they are good men, go about steadily, feeling the flying cranks, and the cross-heads shoot up and down, up and down as regularly as ever, and the dynamo engines hum away to themselves, but you realize that there is something hanging over the whole business which may break at any moment. Presently I felt the steamer swing about and go off on another course, and then a faint boom from away aft. We were zigzagging, and the gunners on the poop had opened fire. The speaking-tube whistled at my ear.

"Thank you, Mr. Harris," said the skipper's voice, very level, from the bridge. "Give her everything you've got. It'll be close this time."

I looked at the gages. Flint and the stokers were doing their business for we couldn't have crowded her to another pound. The engines were going beautifully, only complaining a little at being driven like that.

And then Flint suddenly ran half-way up the ladder in front of me.

"For —— sake!" he cried, his mouth working back and forth queerly. "Number four's letting go! Everything's carried away inside!"

I jumped for the ladder-head, but he didn't budge.

"Inside, I tell you," he screamed. "It'll blow up in a minute!"

"Get back, you fool," I yelled at him.

It was too sudden to do much thinking, but the boiler had evidently not gone yet and it was no time for a man to be quitting his post. I swore something at him and he wavered a minute and then mastered himself and went down ahead of me. At the door of the stoke-hole the stokers had already begun to crowd out. In another minute the whole place would be in a panic. I didn't know what had happened in there, but I just had the one crazy idea that whatever came we had to keep the steam up. I remember thinking for an instant that if there were going to be an explosion, it wouldn't be taking its time this way. I pushed the men ahead of me into the little iron door.

AS I came into the fire-room I was met by a tremendous glare and a shriveling hot blast from number four boiler. All the fire-doors were open, and even above the roaring of the flames I could hear a steady little sizzling noise. I stooped down and looked in, shading my eyes as well as I could. I saw the whole story at a glance.

It was those old tubular boilers of ours; the strain had been too much for them. One of the tubes had pulled loose and it was leaking live steam and water all over the place. It would hold a little while longer,

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but unless it were fixed we could not carry steam on it. "Bank the fire!" I said, and then drew back while the men began to throw in coal, working furiously.

I stopped to think. There were only four boilers in the boat, since she was not a large vessel. We couldn't afford to take the steam off one of them then, when we needed every ounce we could get and more. It was just possible that a man might go in and stop the trouble. There was plenty of room, as far as that went, but the heat in there was terrible. Still, I remembered once having heard of the same thing being done. It would be a long chance but it was no worse than a chance.

And then I saw Flint, leaning against the bunker at the side. I don't know exactly what I thought. How is a man to tell precisely what goes through his mind in a tight place like that? But there was Flint, gray, scared. It was hardly proper for me to take the risk on myself, as I was the only able engineer left in the ship, and responsible for the engine-room. If any one's life was to be staked, his was the most worthless. And an oiler might not know enough to handle the affair.

But I don't want to defend myself. I know that I thought of Lucy, suddenly, all in a flash, and thought of her together with this abject thing cowering against the bunker. I knew if I sent him in he might not come out living. I walked up to him.

"It'll hold all right for a few minutes," I said. "You can fix it if you try. And you've got to try, if we're going to save the ship. Do you understand?"

He blinked at me stupidly, the red light throwing strange shadows across his face.

"Wake up," I said, shaking him. "Get some gloves and a Stillson. What's the matter with you? Are you as yellow as that? Are you afraid?"

He didn't move. I felt that the man was a coward through and through, and that nothing could drive him into that red-hot inferno.

"Then I'll have to go myself," I told him. "See here, it's no part of my duty to chance my life like this and I pity the ship if I leave her in charge of a white-hearted little cur like you."

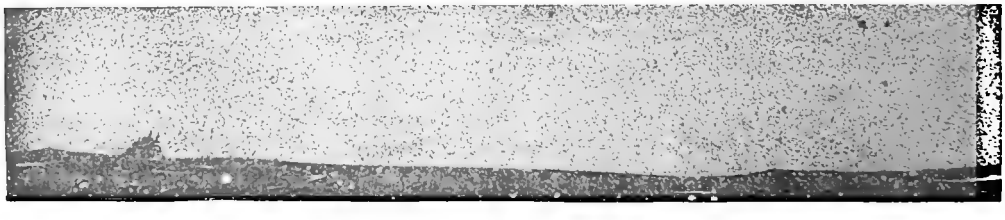
I turned away from him. But he started out in front of me.

"I'll go," he said, and ran back for the wrenches.

When he came through again the fire was banked but the thick smoke was already curling up everywhere from under the fresh coal. It was a stifling, withering murk in there. But he never hesitated for an instant. I sha'n't forget the way he looked when we passed a line around his waist. Then he crawled in——

He stopped the leak. We had to drag him out and as he came on the floor he fainted all together in a heap. The hot water had spurted over him, and he was scalded horribly. I have never seen anything more terrible. Late that night he died. The news was all through the ship, and the crew went about their work in utter silence. Every one knew that Flint, of all men in the world, had given his life to save us. And I—well, I knew that I had killed him. It was not pleasant.

That is all. On the day we buried him in Plymouth I pulled out my drawings. "The Flint-Harris Self-Packing Union." Of course, there was but one thing to do. I tore everything up, and dropped the pieces into Plymouth harbor. I doubt whether I shall ever make another invention. But—but afterward, when I went back to tell Lucy what had happened, I saw what a monstrous fool I had been. I saw then that Flint was nothing to her. And I thought, if things had not come out so, perhaps—but no matter. I was a fool from first to last. Only it might be a little easier now if I knew what sort of man Flint really was. But how am I to tell?



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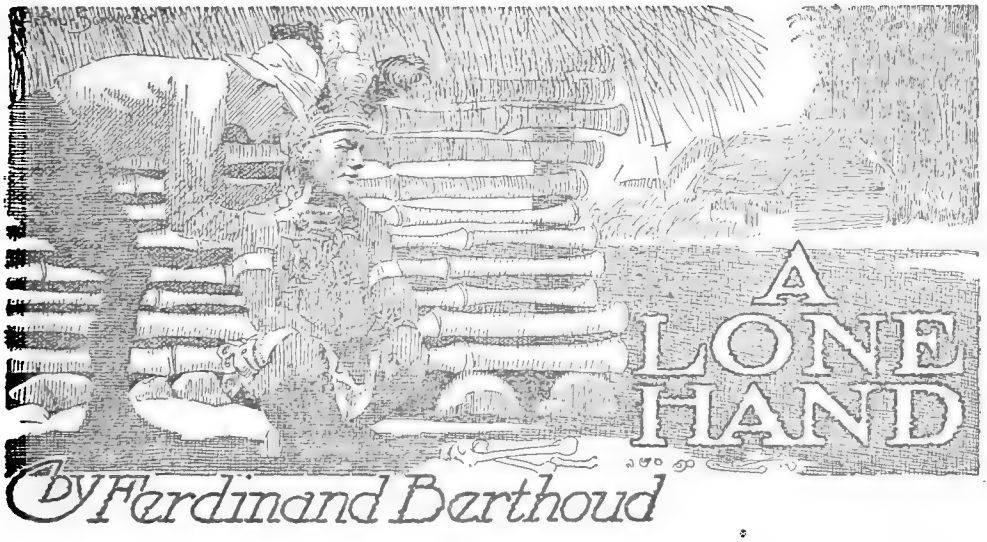

By Ferdinand Berthoud

Author of "The Unholy One."

THE rainy season in 1896 was no worse than in any other year. Yet it caused its difficulties. And so it will until there is either no rain or no Africa in the world.

The coach had left the last outspan five miles behind and now dipped down the steep slope of the bank and into the deep, sandy bed of the dry river. The ten mules struggled and strained to get it quickly through, then struggled still more fiercely and furiously to draw it up the yet stiffer slope of the far bank and out again.

For a moment the mules stuck, the coach started slowly back down the river-bank, and the Kafir sitting beside the Hottentot driver jumped to the ground and commenced laying into them with a *sjambok*.

"*Aik, aik, aik—aikwaah. Tekwaanu,*" he yelled as he lashed along the line.

With desperate energy the mules recovered themselves. Gradually they made the grade and gained the level ground.

All day long the passengers, packed tightly together in the leather-springed coach, had been breathing in the unusual, musty smell in the air. Rain. Rain far away in the distance and swiftly advancing toward them. After the nine months' dry season the fierce tropic rain, beating into the thirsty sand, sent a heavy damp smell hours before it on the hot east wind.

One of the passengers pulled aside the leather flap which acted in place of glass in the coach windows and looked out.

"Getting closer. Well this side of the horizon. Coming along like a tidal wave," he said.

The other passengers, newcomers to up-country Africa, looked out without understanding.

"——!" the man went on. "It's awful. A solid wave of it. It's a veritable sea. Not half a dozen miles away and rushing along like an express."

For a moment he hesitated and looked at the girl opposite him—the only girl among the nine people there.

"It's a pity you didn't come up-country a little earlier," he said, addressing her. "A storm like this is not a pleasant experience for any woman."

The girl smiled innocently. "I couldn't come up earlier," she told him. "Goodness knows I wanted to badly enough."

The approaching rain was now distinctly hearable. All but one of the passengers watched it heedlessly. First as it fell a cloud of dust arose, only to be instantly beaten down again and turned into mud. A wracked, battered sea of mud immediately formed behind the wall of falling water.

The coach stopped mechanically, the mules standing with hindquarters turned to meet the onrushing storm. The Hottentot driver and Kafir, with oil sheets over their heads and bodies, descended and

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stood with their backs in the lee side of the coach.

And the storm came. The mules squealed.

The pelting rain like a rushing cataract brushed aside leather flaps and every covering. In less than a minute the passengers were drenched to the skin. The beating torrent tore through the coach as if no coach existed and the water poured out through the floor and under the doors in miniature fountains. The coach rocked with the impact and felt about to careen. And it was icy cold. The storm was all around with a denseness that turned daylight into dusk.

One of the passengers shouted to the driver—

"Can't you turn back and drive through and get us to the last outspan?"

The driving storm utterly drowned out his voice and he shouted again. The driver didn't notice him.

A third time he shouted, this time reaching and shaking the man's shoulder. The driver showed one eye and one ear from out the oilsheet and the passenger repeated the shout. For an instant the driver looked at him pityingly.

"River full, *baas*," he said. "Run bank full long time, *baas*."

Relentlessly the deluge continued hour after hour in unabated fury. The passengers' teeth chattered; the water ran down their faces, ran inside their clothes, soused up out of their boots. Hopelessly they sat and mutely looked into each other's eyes. The deep sand was now a deep mire. Mud up to the axles, mud up to the knees of the mules.

The day wore on. Hour after hour the clouds belched forth their torrents. Two more hours and it would be sundown. Night in a packed coach in a tropical storm in the center of Africa. And at night it would almost freeze.

Of a sudden, just as it had come, the storm passed on. Bewildered at the instant empty silence, the passengers looked outside. The wall of water, just as compact as ever, was rushing to the west away from them.

A little later the driver turned to a window of the coach.

"Get out walk, *mij baas*. Get out walk, missie. All walk," he explained. "Plenty mud. Too much mud. Coach no move."

Stickily and dripping water from everywhere, one by one the passengers dragged themselves up and staggered out. Their cold sopping clothes stuck clammily to them and held their limbs. As they stepped to the ground their feet sank eighteen inches into it. Cold, gripping, slimy sand. Sand like icy glue.

With tremendous effort Kafir and driver swung the mules round and headed them forward. With *sjamboks* they blundered cursing up and down the line and urged them on. And floundering alongside, searching carefully for firmer spots to get a foothold, the passengers tried to force their way with them.

At the end of a hundred yards the driver turned his mules and directed them off the beaten track to where the sand was unbroken. The rain had washed it clean, the ground was packed and solid and the going perfectly good. The bedraggled passengers climbed back into the bespattered coach, the mules jumped ahead and warmed up; clear going to the next stream seven miles away. On the far side of that stream was the outspan and store. A chance to get dry and a hot meal and a drink.

The sun behind the clouds had dipped. The store on the far bank of the river in the failing light was dimly in sight. The mules cantered to the top of the rise and made to descend to the river-bed. Five minutes more and comfort.

The girl, with all the wet and cold, was smiling. The other passengers smiled with her and fidgeted in readiness to get out.

"Three hot whiskies in a line for me," said one.

"Hot coffee with a stick in it," chimed in another.

The coach came to an abrupt halt. Through the gloom the face of the driver appeared at the side of it.

"This river full, *mij baas*. Run bank full," he announced. "No get 'cross."

As he said it the storm burst forth again with ten times greater fury.

THORNTON HAY, walking anxiously up and down under the grass-covered veranda of the wattle-and-daub trading-store, waited impatiently for the arrival of the up-country coach. Six hundred miles it was from the nearest railroad station and the journey would take anywhere from six to fourteen days, but under present conditions it should not have

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taken more than eight. And this was the afternoon of the eighth day.

Willie Galt, still dressed in his pajamas, sauntered lazily out of the store and joined Thornton.

"Ought to hear the coach-horn pretty soon," he said. "The driver usually blows about four miles from here and the clear air carries the news to us ahead of him."

"Should hear it any minute now," Thornton nervously agreed.

Galt laughed teasingly.

"Suppose after all she isn't on the coach," he said.

"She'll be there right enough," Thornton insisted. "A runner brought me a telegram she'd sent from Mafeking only an hour before she started."

Galt was still teasing.

"Then I suppose when the coach leaves here you'll leave along and go into town and get married right away."

"You bet. Get tied up tight as a drum and then let the old man know where she is. I'll gamble he's almost crazy now looking for her."

"What was the reason he was always so against you—so determined you shouldn't marry her?" Galt asked.

"He wasn't against me," Thornton told him. "I've never met him—never even seen him. He was determined *no one* should marry her. All the years after his wife died while he was struggling along in this country here and until he finally made his millions she was his sole companion. He watched her grow like a flower. The apple of his eye. He's actually jealous of her."

Galt thought a moment. In that country of vast distances loneliness means something and is easy to appreciate.

"I don't know that I blame him," he said. "And she had to watch her opportunity, eh? Dodged away from him in Capetown on this round-the-world tour he was taking. Daughterly little girl she must be," he grinned.

Thornton smiled too.

"I'm not stealing her. Not taking her forever out of the old man's life," he explained. "After once we're married he can see her at any time and arrange to live right next door if he likes. The thing is to get her far enough away from him to get the whole marriage service gone through in one piece without him throwing a monkey-wrench into the works or blowing the whole arrangement to blazes."

"And then you'll settle down right here where your claims are, eh?" Galt asked.

"Certainly. Try the same as her father. Take over his mascot. Good idea, isn't it?"

The afternoon sun blazed fiercely. The air carried a damp, musty odor. Galt sniffed it analytically.

"Rain before night," he said decidedly. "Not far off and rushing this way."

Thornton sniffed too, and looked to the east with thoughtful, troubled eyes.

"Please God she isn't caught in this little lot," he said.

"The drivers have sense enough," Galt soothed him. "They've no wish to get caught in it either. They'll stop at the nearest outspan if it gets close to them."

The smell grew stronger; the hot air more damp and sticky. A wall of water appeared on the horizon, came nearer and nearer in a cloud of dust. In less than half an hour the sun was blotted out and water poured down like waves lashing on a beach. The whole world seemed sopping.

The rain hurled through the grass roof of the veranda and instead of falling in millions of huge drops fell in hundreds of huge spouts. The battered ground sent the water in streams ankle-deep over the mud floor. Still Thornton walked nervously up and down, scarcely heeding the drenching clothes sticking tightly to him. At each turn his eyes searched anxiously through the half-light and sought the top of the rise on the far side of the now roaring river. No coach. No sign of a coach. A coach even with all the mules on earth could never ride through this.

Once or twice Thornton stopped to enter the store and speak to Galt. There, too, the rain was pouring in. The tarpaulin on top of the roof was old and thin and the water continually found new vents. Galt was busy actively dodging round looking for non-existent dry spots.

For two solid hours the torrent continued, then finished as abruptly as it had begun and went soughing away into the distance. The sudden silence seemed uncanny.

Soon the veranda stopped dripping, the rushing streams ceased pouring along, only the swollen river milled and surged. Thornton's spirits rose; Galt's rose with them.

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Both men stood beneath the veranda and each eagerly scanned the far bank of the river.

"May make it tonight if they've reached the last outspan and waited there," Galt remarked thoughtfully. "But if they do they can't cross the river before midnight. It won't have gone down enough before then."

Thornton looked fixedly at the tumbling river. "I hope to —— they don't come," he said. "But if they do and they can't come across I'm going over to them."

Galt laughed knowingly.

"You'll not go over. You'll go down instead," he explained.

A half-hour passed. Still the two men stood, intermittently talking together. Their clothes steamed on them in the hot east wind and commenced stickily drying.

Away, away from the distance the soft, clear notes of a coach-horn strayed over to them. The two men looked into each other's eyes in a satisfied yet puzzled manner. Again the coach-horn sounded—even clearer this time.

"Four miles to come yet," Galt quietly remarked.

Thornton looked anxiously to the east to a swiftly advancing wall of water. "And twelve to fifteen miles to come that way, eh?" he rejoined.

The men waited, waited with the tenseness of the gambler, which every African white man is.

A half-hour, the heads of two mules rose over the brow of the rise on the far riverbank. More mules, the top of a coach, a whole coach. The driver, careful of all things, saw the rushing water and stopped.

As he stopped, blackness almost of night came down and with it a seething torrent. Coach and mules became an almost shapeless shadow.

Hatless and as he was, Thornton rushed for the river. Galt seeing him, though still in his pajamas, rushed after him. At the edge of the frothing water he caught him.

"Don't be a crazy fool," Galt shouted to him over the thunder of the thrashing rain. "You'll be drowned sure as you're alive."

Thornton struggled to free himself from the restraining hands.

"I'll get through it right enough. If she's got to stay all night in this wet inferno I'll stay along," he said hoarsely.

Grimly Galt hung to him.

"Do you think your girl wants to come here and find you a suicide?" he hissed between his teeth. "I've seen trees uprooted and washed down this river. I've seen pythons and crocodiles washed away. I've even seen a hippo swirled away and drowned."

Thornton ceased struggling. Both men stood on the edge of the frenzied water and peered intently at the shadowy coach. The Kafir and driver had left their seats and now floundered alongside the mules. Grasping the bridles of the leaders, the driver turned them aside. The Kafir lashed along the line. By almost superhuman effort they steered all the mules the same way. The coach slowly swerved, moved to one side and a score of yards along the riverbank, endwise to the pelting rain. It stopped. Driver and Kafir huddled under it.

Night, impenetrable, soot-black night fell and wrapped the earth in rain and inky blackness.

Still the rain splashed down. Till midnight it poured ceaselessly. And Thornton, walking endlessly up and down under the veranda, fairly slept as he walked. Human body eventually could no longer stand the strain of sopping clothes, icy coldness and want of rest. Thornton went into the store, poured himself a drink and felt himself for a match. In that dripping dampness he might as well have felt for diamonds. His matches were paste. Groping around in the back of the store, he found sacks. A heap of sacks, some full, some half-full, some empty—all oozing slimy water. Without a thought of comfort, of rheumatism or of fever he lay heavily on them and fell instantly into unconscious sleep.

THE first suggestion of dawn was softly streaming over the horizon as Galt roughly shook Thornton by the shoulder.

"Get up and come outside," he said very seriously.

Thornton rose stiffly to his feet, his wet clothes wrapping painfully round him. Together the two men walked out under the veranda and to the end of it. In the half-light each man stared fixedly across the river. Then each looked dully at the other.

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No coach, no mules, no sign of a living thing.

Wordlessly Thornton rushed to the river and stood for a moment on the bank of it. The river, filling so quickly, was sinking almost as rapidly. For a moment he paused and measured the current with his eye. Then with extreme care he slowly stepped down into the swirling water. It was almost up to his armpits.

Heading up-stream and feeling painstakingly for the slightest help to a firm footing, he gradually made his way across the two hundred feet of torrent. The rushing stream had washed away all loose sand and left a more solid road, but every few yards the waves surged over his shoulders and splashed into his face.

More than once he completely lost his balance and had to struggle frantically to save being washed helplessly away. And at the very extreme edge of the stream he forget himself, stepped unthinkingly into the hole where the coaches always bumped from the slope to the level and found himself floating. Only a mad, furious grappling at the slime-covered scrub on the bank saved him.

Utterly heedless of his own narrow escape he scrambled to his feet and staggered up the rise. At the top was the place where the coach had turned and halted. Not the faintest trace of even so much as a track. Thrashing rain had washed away every scratch, every mark or sign of a mark.

With numbed brain Thornton stood and looked around. The short African dawn had finished. The fierce sun was up and the earth was steaming. Clear to the horizon a sea of steam—the river a winding line of steam. With troubled eyes he stood and peered along the surface of the water as far as sight could penetrate the shimmering haze. Nothing! Water, water, swirling water. Sousing, surging water; besides that utter silence.

Thornton gazed at the earth in front of him unseeingly. His paralyzed brain refused to act. Mechanically he stumbled down the river-bank; uncaringly he plowed back through the muddy stream. In the store he drank a half-tumbler of neat brandy and he lay face downward on the sopping, oozing sacks.

For him the world had finished.

All that day details of Mounted Police from the fort at Mangwe searched the river-bank, but without success. Every indication of which direction the coach may have taken was absolutely washed away. That the mules had bolted and tumbled the coach down the river-bank was out of the question. They had been far too numbed for that. And even had the wind been strong enough to blow the coach over, the coach would still have lain on its side and anchored them.

Fruitlessly the police scoured the country around them. One party rode back to the previous outspan, another inspected the now dying river for five miles down. Of evidence there was absolutely not a scrap. Then late in the afternoon a Kafir rushed excitedly into the store and said he had seen a coach and mules wrapped round a rock in the river-bed more than a dozen miles away.

Instantly Galt closed the store and he and Thornton with a body of police galloped across-country to hit the winding stream where the Kafir had directed. There sure enough was the coach. A huge, jagged rock in the center of the river had caught it. On one side sagged the coach and the two wheel-mules; on the other side, securely holding it, were all but one of the other eight mules. But one set of harness had given way.

The party separated and searched intently; searched the inside of the coach, the outside and every rock, stone or branch of a tree in the vicinity. For several hundred yards along the bed of the stream pieces of luggage and freight were picked up. Even the driver's satchel with his papers and way-bills was found, but of passengers not a vestige. There was not a hat or shoe or particle of clothing of any description. The passengers had apparently vanished off the face of the earth.

One of the police shook his head mournfully.

"Washed away into some quiet pool where the crocodiles got them," he said.

"That doesn't look likely," another policeman corrected. "They'd have left some little bit of evidence of one sort or another if they had been."

"That's the only way I can see," argued the first man. "They're not alive or some of us would have found one or another of them by now."

The second man was still unconvinced.

"It's certainly a long shot," he went on,

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"but they may have got to the hills. Though how in the name of fortune they'd get all that distance in that inky blackness and rain is more than I know. And why?"

The salvaged freight had been piled together on the river-bank. Ruefully Thornton looked the lot over, then carefully studied the sodden way-bills. "See anything wrong with that, corporal?" he asked presently, handing a way-bill to the policeman standing by him.

The corporal looked the list over minutely, then looked it over more minutely still. Next he investigated the rescued stuff.

"Phew," he whistled thoughtfully. "Three boxes of specie! 'Most everything here but three boxes of specie. And they, being heaviest, would have sunk first and been found first. Why, if we'd found just one—only one—of them, if only one were here it would look different."

Together the crowd went back to the coach and, working lustily, moved it aside. Nothing beneath it. Just the depression in which it had lain. That was all.

The corporal looked at the straps which had held the luggage aboard. Meanwhile Thornton curiously opened and examined the numerous wounds on the mules. The two men looked at each other questioningly.

"Straps weren't even unbuckled or ropes untied," the corporal said. "Just slashed apart."

"And most of the wounds on the mules were certainly not made by rocks either," Thornton added. "These mules were stabbed to death and stabbed by Kafirs. All neatly assegaied."

The corporal shook his head. "Doesn't fit in," he explained. "Kafirs can't read as a rule. If they could they wouldn't know what 'specie' meant. And if they did and they had it it would be of little use to them."

"Unless they were half-castes," Thornton suggested.

The corporal stayed silent a while in deep study. "The only half-castes anywhere near here are those two Portuguese who run a trading-store twenty miles away in the direction of that big mine of Hulin's," he said presently. "They're fishy customers, but how in the world were they to know that a coach was mired and stalled on the river-bank on such a fierce night?"

At the name "Hulin" Thornton started violently. The last sentence entirely escaped him. Hulin was the girl's father. It was Cecile Hulin they were looking for.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," Thornton said, shaking his head.

"I'm afraid it is, too," agreed the corporal, little knowing how closely Thornton was concerned. "We'll send runners to every white man and every Kafir chief for a hundred miles down the river telling them to look out for bodies. And we'll question every Kafir living anywhere in close vicinity and particularly question those two Portuguese. We may some day trace the specie, but the passengers and drivers you can be absolutely certain are dead."

As in a dream Thornton rode beside Galt back to the store. And next day, still in a dream, he returned to his mining-claims and day after day thereafter worked listlessly at his battery and with the claims without the slightest ambition in the wide, wide world.

THE Kafir witch-doctor squatted on his haunches in the yard behind Thornton's grass-roofed hut. His woolly head was adorned with a flowing head-dress of black and white ostrich feathers which came close over his forehead. Suspended from the head-dress and hanging around his chin like a beard was a long wisp of monkey hair. The face was smeared and painted with colored earth in horrid, filthy lines, making it more like a demon's than a human countenance.

Round his neck hung necklaces of human teeth, monkey teeth, leopards' claws, human bones and dried lizards. Round his waist was a belt supporting numerous little bags containing herbs and mysterious potions. And round his arms and legs were strips of monkey skin and copper armlets and leglets innumerable.

Thornton, passing on his way to lunch, noted him casually through the corner of his eye. Wandering Kafirs were a common occurrence. At supper-time the witch-doctor was squatting like an ugly piece of sculpture in exactly the same place. Curious, Thornton turned to him in passing. The Kafir still squatted.

"*Sacca bona, M'Lungu,*" he said. Thornton returned the greeting and went on in for his meal.

"Who's that Kafir out there in the yard?"

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he asked the Cape-boy waiter when he had nearly finished his supper.

"A witch-doctor, *baas*. A stranger round here," the boy told him nervously.

"What does he want here, anyhow?" Thornton queried irritably.

"Says he wants to make medicine, *baas*."

Thornton laughed.

"I'll make medicine him, the —— old fraud. It's about time this witch-doctor business was done away with for good and all."

"He says he wants to make medicine for you, *baas*. Says you are sick and he wants to cure you," the Cape-boy continued seriously, witch-doctors having as much terror for him as for the rawest Kafir.

Thornton swore softly to himself and finished his supper lazily.

On the way out through the yard he paused. The witch-doctor was still there. Thornton went over to him.

"Get out of here, you old fraud," he said in Kafir, yet not unkindly. "Clear away home. I don't want you round here frightening bogies into my Kafirs."

The witch-doctor didn't make any suggestion of moving. Instead he calmly took five flat, square, queerly marked human bones out of one of his many bags and threw them on the ground. Carefully looking them over, he studied them as if reading some difficult message, then looked up at Thornton.

"The *M'Lungu* is sick," he said.

Thornton made a pass at him with his foot as if to kick him.

"*Hamba, voetsack*, get. Don't hang round here and try to make me think I'm sick when I'm just as fit as any man living."

Still the Kafir didn't move.

"The *M'Lungu* is sick in his heart," he went on.

Thornton laughed deprecatingly at him.

"Rubbish," he said.

The witch-doctor collected the bones, shook them in his hands and threw them out again. As before he silently studied them and mysteriously read them over.

"The father of the *M'Lungu* is dead," he announced. "Across the Great Water the *M'Lungu* has a mother and two sisters and one brother."

Now all that was perfectly true, yet the dirty witch-doctor and he had never set eyes on each other before. Thornton was interested.

Again the witch-doctor collected the bones and shook them, then cast them before him.

"The *M'Lungu* loved a white woman and wished to take her to wife. In the darkness the flooded river took her."

In an instant Thornton was on one knee by the side of the Kafir.

"What in —— do you know, you doddering, jabbering old ——?" he asked fiercely.

The Kafir looked him straight in the eyes and once more threw the bones. Darkness was falling. As he picked up the bones he slowly rose.

"The white missis still lives," he replied disinterestedly.

Thornton had him by the shoulders, his face close to the hideous paint and monkey hair.

"Where is she? Where is she? Tell me?" he asked with frantic eagerness.

The Kafir wriggled like a snake, the hands slipped from the bare shoulders.

"Some day the stars will tell me, *M'Lungu*. Then the *M'Lungu* shall know," he said without expression. Next minute the night had swallowed him up.

Hope mixed with fear once again entered Thornton's brain. Hope, yet the agony of knowing nothing. For days he waited anxiously, looking for the witch-doctor to reappear, but he had vanished as completely as if he had never existed. In his anxiety he questioned every Kafir working for him and every wandering Kafir who passed, but none knew whence the witch-doctor had come or whither he had gone. Some said he was a Kafir of another tribe; some said his own people may have got word of his doings and killed him for giving information to a white man. No one could do more than surmise.

What tortured Thornton worst of all was the fearful uncertainty. That Cecile Hulin still lived he now didn't for a moment doubt, but had the Kafir come to tell him, to help him, been sent to bring him a message or simply been sent by some one holding her to taunt him? Was she being ill used, mistreated, tortured or in danger of her life? The conflicting hopes and fears almost took his mind away.

More than a week passed and the witch-doctor hadn't put in an appearance. The loneliness and want of some one to exchange thoughts with was appalling. Already he had visited Hulin's mine and questioned every one from manager to

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Kafir water-boy again and again. They, too, were just as anxious and upset as he and could give no shred of information.

The Portuguese half-castes he had visited time after time and questioned. At first he had tried to find what they knew in the course of casual conversation but had made no headway at all. Then in desperation he had resorted to direct questioning and had run up against a stone wall. The Portuguese had simply ignored him.

Quiet interrogation of their Kafirs had had the same result. Either the Kafirs knew nothing at all concerning the loss of the coach or else were in too great fear of the Portuguese to say anything. And, even though Thornton had cunningly insinuated a couple of the most intelligent of his own Kafirs into the employ of the Portuguese with instructions to ferret out any scrap of information possible, he had not been able to get so much as a single syllable to enlighten him.

The Mounted Police, immediately after the finding of the coach, had swooped down on the Portuguese and examined them minutely but without success. Neither did examination of their Kafirs yield them anything. It was even suggested that the Kafirs who may have been implicated in the affair had been spread out to their homes in distant *kraals* and swallowed up in the hordes of Kafirs in the hills. Search of the store and huts had not given up a sign of specie or single scrap of evidence of any description whatsoever.

And yet the Police, Thornton and all concerned were perfectly sure that, even if they had not themselves driven the coach into the river, the Portuguese knew quite well how the thing had happened.

A month after the storm, at Thornton's suggestion, the police had made a second unexpected raid on the Portuguese, and again searched and questioned them. Not a vestige of evidence could be found, nor was any more headway made than on their previous visit. The half-castes were impossible.

AT LAST one morning, fretting over the continual uncertainty, Thornton decided to ride over and see the half-castes again. Even some one to talk to would be a welcome change. It was only a matter of thirty miles each way and he could do it easily in a day. So ordering a horse saddled, he armed himself for once in his life and started out.

The thirty miles to the Portuguese trading-station were as nothing. The horse was good, the day bright and the going fine. In a little more than three hours he came in sight of the outlying Kafir huts surrounding the store and came to a walk to investigate better his surroundings and to prepare for whatever eventuality might turn up.

The usual scraggy goats grazed around unattended; a few fat-tailed sheep browsed lazily; a straggling host of fowls picked what living they could from slugs and locusts.

To Thornton all this was quite natural. Every *kraal* and trading-post in the country kept its own live-stock for food, but what struck him immediately was that not a single Kafir, not even a piccanin' was to be seen herding the stock. So far as humanity went the post was deserted.

With some misgiving Thornton rode into the *kraal* and across it. In the center of the *kraal* was the mud and thatch trading-store itself, a building over a hundred feet long. On the far side of the store, high above the roof, the upper branches of a tall tree were noticeable.

At the back of the store Thornton drew up to a closed door, hesitated and listened. Apparently not a living thing. With his *sjambok* he pushed the door. It didn't move. With his foot he pushed it. Still it didn't give. Leaning over, he tried the rough latch. The door was either locked or barred.

For a moment Thornton sat quietly deciding what next to do. And as he sat the sound of a loud, harsh voice at the front of the store reached him. Silently he waited, listening intently.

"Now I want all you men to witness," the voice was saying in perfect Kafir, yet not as a Kafir or a white man speaks it, "what happens to any man who comes spying or interfering with my affairs. Even as I am going to kill this man so will I kill him. I will cut him into little pieces and feed him to the vultures and the jackals. For I am a law unto myself and shall carry out that law unflinchingly and as I see fit."

A loud assent as of a hundred voices—"*Uh-uh, yehbo, Inkoos,*" went up.

Thornton smiled grimly. Every white man in that part of the world was a law unto himself right enough, he thought, but

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he always stopped short at life and death, even if not so very far short of it.

With a touch of his foot Thornton urged his horse forward, rode along the side of the store and round to the front. There round the foot of the tree, the top of which he had noticed, was a close semi-circle of Kafirs. At the mouth of the semi-circle were the Portuguese half-castes. Quietly he rode up to them and quickly took in the whole scene.

Some of the Kafirs were standing, some squatting, some lying. All were silent and looking with horrified, superstitious fear in one direction, at a man hanging by his hands from a branch of the tree. The man's hands were tied together; his feet were tied together; the feet were six inches above the ground. And the fearing look of the Kafirs was as much for the vengeance of the hanging man after he had been killed as for the fierceness of the men who had cowed them and who were about to kill him.

Yet all the while they faintly hoped that the man's magic—his *tagati*—would at the last minute somehow miraculously allow him to free himself. For, although they feared him, they in a way despised him too much to take the risk, unaided, of a rescue.

The man was Thornton's witch-doctor.

The two Portuguese half-castes, each almost as dark as the Kafirs in front of them, spoke together for a little while, then one called to a man standing near to hand him a *sjambok*. The man handed him a hippopotamus-hide whip, each lash of which would cut a man's flesh open clear round him. The Portuguese took it and stood off, measuring his distance from the suspended man. As he did so the other half-caste set the body spinning.

Thornton nosed his horse in between the two men.

"Stop it," he said angrily. "If you hit that man I'll get down and half-kill the both of you."

The Portuguese looked at him as if they had only just noticed him, then noted who he was with a scowl. The horse stood still. The whipless Portuguese stepped to the horse, caught the bridle and, putting his back against the horse's shoulder, started to edge him away.

The wicked *sjambok* whistled shrilly through the air, came with a sickening *swish* right around the swiftly spinning body and left a yard-long wound oozing and spurting blood.

The witch-doctor gave a loud, long, groaning sigh.

Thornton made to slip to the ground. The Portuguese seized the reins in both hands, backed the horse and forced him to half rear. Before Thornton could get to his feet the *sjambok* fell a second time.

The witch-doctor's sighing groan ended with a kind of whistle through his nose.

Thornton was down to the Portuguese with the whip and at him. As rough-and-tumble fighters Thornton well knew the little, under-developed men, though wiry, were useless. The half-caste raised the whip-handle and struck furiously at his face. The blow went wild and Thornton's fist easily caught him on the unprotected point of the jaw. As he staggered back Thornton gripped his *sjambok* and wrested it from his hand. The other half-caste instantly drew his hunting-knife, turned and lunged sidewise at him with it. And Thornton slashed at his wrist almost as he would smack at a naughty child, then smashed him squarely on the head. Then he backed to his horse.

The Portuguese quickly recovered themselves and came at him again together like a couple of little wildcats. Their eyes were the eyes of animals. With a word and a movement the horse turned slightly; the Portuguese were between Thornton and the still spinning witch-doctor.

Fiercely, but more warily and each with a knife, the Portuguese came on. Hissing and cursing, they lunged at every possible opportunity. And Thornton with the *sjambok* returned blow for lunge. A dozen times the *sjambok* cracked on them loudly, yet their tough, tanned hides stood it. The worst they had done to him was a ripped shirt and a slight, clean scratch above the knee. He was much too far from their reach and his back was to his horse. They were bound to face him.

Thornton pressed at the horse's side. Slowly the horse backed away sidewise. And as he backed Thornton saw over the Portuguese' shoulder the Kafirs cut down the bleeding witch-doctor and hurry him away in the midst of them.

The half-castes were growing careless. Their vicious, crazy, animal anger made them heedless of strategy. The man he had just hit on the head now lowered that

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head and in desperation charged blindly. Thornton kicked as he came and hit him fairly in the neck. Coughing, the man rolled over.

Only the one active man remained for the moment and he instantly became more cautious. Like a monkey he danced away, then danced around looking for an opening to stab. The other man rose to his hands and knees and crawled for the door of the store. The horse backed steadily for the corner of the building.

For a full minute the Portuguese danced around. Thornton, though almost amused at his antics, never for an instant moved his eyes from him. Then Thornton got tired. With a sudden jump and two quick steps he was fairly atop the half-caste. The little man, unready, sprang backward and sidewise in sudden terror. Thornton's *sjambok* hit him cleanly under the ear and he collapsed grinning stupidly as if wondering what had happened to him.

Without any further ado Thornton ran to his horse, sprang to the saddle and headed for the side of the store. As he gained it the Portuguese in the doorway opened fire. Five shots from a revolver whizzed harmlessly past.

"Doesn't look as if I'm ever going to get so very much information from those fellows," mused Thornton grimly as he cantered away. "And yet I don't dare to shoot and risk killing either of them until I've found if they really know anything."

ANOTHER week passed and Thornton was in greater torture of mind than ever. No word or means of getting word, yet the continual knowledge—half-pleasure, half-fear—that Cecile Hulin still lived. No one to question further, no further means of getting any trace, any evidence, no direction in which to make a move. Only the open, sparsely peopled country, only the hills. She might be anywhere, perhaps already nowhere.

Thornton's eyes sank in, the lines on his face deepened and spread. And his brain ached—just seemed to ache and crackle. A girl's life perhaps forfeit and he the indirect cause of it.

If only the witch-doctor would come once again and speak one way or the other. But was he fit to come? If he could only be found! Yet day after day nothing. The monotony of space, the monotony of loneliness, the monotony of his own thoughts, the monotony of aiming nowhere.

The sun was sinking. Thornton was moodily finishing his supper, his Cape-boy waiter standing patiently by. Suddenly the Cape-boy started.

"Look, *baas!* Look!" he said, pointing.

Thornton looked outside in the direction indicated. A couple of dozen feet from the doorway, crouching rigidly still, was the witch-doctor. Almost taking the table with him, Thornton sprang up and rushed outside. Not waiting for greetings or anything else, he stood above the witch-doctor.

"Where is she? Is she alive?" he asked eagerly, excitedly.

The Kafir looked at him, apparently unmoved.

"*Sacca bona M'Lungu,*" he said.

"Never mind about any '*Sacca bonas,*'" Thornton snapped irritably. "Answer me, is she alive?"

For answer the witch-doctor produced the five human bones and threw them out. Thornton knelt before him, his eyes fixed on them in anxious fascination.

The witch-doctor looked them over, examined them carefully, to Thornton's mind unnecessarily long.

"The *M'Lungu* loves a white missis. He wants to take her to wife," he said monotonously.

Thornton cursed.

"Don't go over that stupid trash again," he burst out. "You've told me that before. Is she alive? That's what I want to know."

As if unhearing, the witch-doctor picked up the bones, shook them and threw them out. Unruffled, he pondered over them.

"Away in the hills in the west is the temple of the *M'Limo*, the arch priest and worldly form of the Great Spirit," was all he appeared to read.

"—— the *M'Limo*," Thornton spluttered. "He ought to have been shot long ago. Is the white missis alive? I'm waiting to hear. Ask those bones of yours."

The witch-doctor threw the human bones once more and with aggravating slowness proceeded to translate them.

"The temple of the *M'Limo* is deep, deep in the hills," he read. "There are caves—many dark caves. In the inmost cave is the temple of the *M'Limo*."

Again Thornton cursed the witch-doctor for keeping him so long in suspense then,

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seeing him throw the bones a fourth time, awaited developments with greater patience.

The witch-doctor studied a moment, then looked up. "When the sun is directly overhead two days from now is the time of the great sacrifice," he said disinterestedly. "The Centabele to the north of us are being defeated by the whites. Two days from today the *M'Limo* makes sacrifice of everything white to the Great Spirit in prayer for help."

Thornton jumped up, his eyes fairly blazing.

"What the —— are you beating about the bush like this for? Tell me where my girl is or I'll half kill you."

Perfectly calm, the witch-doctor collected his bones and threw them gently out. Then he looked innocently up into Thornton's eyes.

"The white missis is to be a sacrifice."

With a snarl Thornton jumped at him and bore him to the ground. Frantically he gripped him by the neck and roughly shook his head from side to side.

"Tell me at once, where is the girl?" he hissed.

The witch-doctor scarcely struggled.

"If the *M'Lungu* will loose my neck," he gasped, "I will tell him what the stars have told me."

Unwilling, Thornton loosened his hold on him and sat helplessly back. To bide his time and wait was all that he could do.

The witch-doctor straightened himself up to squatting position and, regaining his bones, threw them from him. Once more he studied deeply.

"The white missis is in the hands of the *M'Limo*. Until she is produced for the sacrifice none can tell where she is hidden," he said.

Immediately Thornton saw light.

"You mean you know he has her but you don't know where he keeps her. And it's up to me by hook or by crook to be present when that sacrifice is going to take place, eh?" he asked more pleasantly.

The Kafir looked deeply, searchingly into his eyes.

"The *M'Lungu* has spoken," he said.

For a moment there was silence—each man intent on his own thoughts. The witch-doctor was the first to speak. Turning, he pointed to a hill more than twenty miles away, the first of a maze of hills fading into the sky-line.

"When the sun sets tomorrow evening the *M'Lungu* must be at that hill. There is a dense clump of trees at the foot of it on this side. I shall be inside them. But the *M'Lungu* must not come alone."

Slowly and with great precision, as if to make his words sink in thoroughly, the witch-doctor continued:

"In the night I shall guide you to the caves of the *M'Limo* and into the cave of the sacrifice. Then I shall leave you."

For a second he hesitated and looked with a strange, hard look, seeming to attempt to pierce Thornton's brain.

"I shall leave you. I must be with the *M'Limo* at the side of the *M'Limo* at the time of the sacrifice."

An uncertain, distrustful feeling crept over Thornton and he clearly showed it. The sacrifice of everything white? And he a further sacrifice to the Great Spirit perhaps?

The witch-doctor watched him intently; read every thought as it passed through his mind.

Silently he raised his hands above him; in silence he brought them down to his chest and waist; in silence he moved one hand along each of the now livid, half-healed, purple welts which the *sjambok* had left completely round him.

Thornton looked steadily at them, looked above into the eyes of the witch-doctor. Instantly his own eyes cleared and shone hopefully—shone as they had never shone for many weeks before.

THE sun was touching the edge of the horizon next evening as six men rode up to the clump of trees at the foot of the hill. Thornton, Galt, an old prospector named Nattrass and three of the Mounted Police. The six men dismounted and Thornton alone pushed his way into the thick, tangled patch of timber. A few yards inside and the witch-doctor rose before him.

"Bring the horses in amongst the trees, *M'Lungu*," he said. "We must leave them here. When it is quite dark we will go."

The horses were brought in and the men waited impatiently the few short minutes for the swift African night to fall.

"No man who may be watching on any hill near us must know which way we go," the witch-doctor explained.

Darkness came and he made ready to move. The white men fell in behind him

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in single file and, keeping close together, they set out at a steady walk. The witch-doctor dipped straight into the hills and it was soon evident that he was twisting and turning in a regular maze. For a few hundred yards the way would be along a winding path, then across unbroken ground, then into and along the deep bed of a dry mountain-torrent. And always as they progressed the hills grew higher, closer and more rocky. A white man coming in even in broad daylight would have been more likely to have got lost than ever to have got out again alive.

The night was inky black; the hills loomed up like huge ghosts. Only the shrill, crazy yapping of jackals or occasionally the fiendish laugh of a distant hyena broke the silence. Once or twice a frightened hare scuttered away, several times large lizards dragged their heavy bodies out of danger. Night hawks flew past on muffled wings.

For a full three hours and into a fourth they marched, climbed and struggled along. In the cool night air the unusual exertion was as nothing.

The narrow valley they were traversing grew narrower; rocks closed in in front. The path they were on ended and they picked their way for a distance over loose stones. A huge black *kopje* faced them. They had either to climb over it or go back.

The witch-doctor turned and spoke in a low tone.

"Be silent, *M'Lungu*," he said. "The temple of the *M'Limo* is in that mountain ahead of us. I am going to lead you into the shadows and hide you. I will go on in and see if all is right. When it is I will come back for you. If I do not come back before daylight still hide and wait for me."

"Suppose you get killed and don't come back?" Thornton suggested anxiously.

"Alone I shall not get killed, *M'Lungu*," the witch-doctor explained. "But if they find you in daylight, though you may kill many, they will surely kill you."

"Sounds pleasant," Galt chimed in, scratching his head meditatively, "but we're in it and we've got to stand the gaff. Lead on, old man."

The witch-doctor took them over the rocks, higher and higher. Soon he stopped, pushed a large flat rock sidewise and revealed a dark hole.

"Stoop down," he told them, "and crawl in here."

"How about if I meet a sackful of snakes or a sleeping leopard?" Thornton asked.

"I have seen to that. You will not," the witch-doctor said quietly.

All six crawled in. Inside the hole broadened out into a small chamber. The witch-doctor pushed the stone in front of the opening. "I shall be but a little while," he said in parting. "When I return I shall rap on the stone. Until I rap do not even speak."

In less than an hour the witch-doctor returned and rapped, then rolled the stone aside.

"They sleep," he said. "Every one sleeps. But we must be careful, terribly careful. Like animals in the night we must creep in. One slip and your lives as well as mine will be forfeit."

Then he added thoughtfully and with deep meaning—

"He who dies at the hands of the *M'Limo* does not die happily."

The six men crawled through the opening and straightened up in the still air. After the impenetrable blackness of the hole they had been in the darkness of night seemed much lighter to them. The great *kopje* in front of them soared up so huge that it appeared almost to blot out the sky. Away down the few hundred feet which they had climbed a mass of shadowy jagged, jumbled rocks.

The witch-doctor spoke quietly and they went forward.

"Step with great care," he said. "In the still night sound carries and a rolling stone might almost wake the dead."

Up and up they went, twisting and turning till it seemed to the whites they must be crossing and recrossing their own tracks. In places towering rocks completely overhung their path; several times they passed between rocks so close together their shoulders touched on either side; more than once they were led through tunnels too low to permit of standing upright. And always the low timber was so thick and intertwined that the sky was completely blotted out.

From the beginning it was apparent to all that not a step had been taken on any beaten track. To have retraced their way as they had come would have been absolutely impossible. Only by each man touching the man in front of him could they even be sure of the way they were aiming.

It seemed soon they must reach the very

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sky itself, but never once did the witch-doctor hesitate or slacken speed. The whites, though thoroughly fit and sinewy as the open African life had made them, were fast tiring.

"Let us rest a while," Thornton said at last, addressing the Kafir. "This climbing is hard work and we shall need all our strength."

"A little while longer—a very little while," the witch-doctor replied, pointing above his head, yet never slackening speed.

The whites looked above them in the direction his arm in the darkness appeared to take. Nothing. Blackness with blacker shadows in it.

The rocks became fewer; the overhanging trees ceased. Soon they stepped out on to a flat, open space a dozen or more yards square. "The entrance to the temple is behind the rocks above this," the witch-doctor whispered.

For a few minutes they sat and rested, then made ready to move on.

"Take off your boots and hide them at the edge of this space," the witch-doctor advised. "The rocks in the passage may cut your feet, but that is better than risking making a noise."

The boots were hidden. Moving was now more difficult. The Kafir, his own feet harder, yet appreciated the tenderness of the white men's flesh. Very slowly and carefully he led the way.

A few yards and they came to a large, smooth upright stone. The Kafir skirted it to the right, then turned behind it. Another large stone faced them. For a moment they traveled between the stones. The space between the stones widened and the Kafir led to the right again.

"Stoop low," he said.

Stooping, they followed him. Next instant they knew they were in a passage leading into the very vitals of the mountain.

FOR about thirty feet the passage rose sharply and, crouching close to the ground, they soon reached the top of the rise. The witch-doctor ahead stood upright, the whites straightened with him.

"From here we can stand, *Ezum' Lungu*," he whispered. "Here I will speak for a while, for after we leave here it must be silence. The vast caves inside carry the voice of man too far. Even a whisper travels and echoes back."

The whites stood listening attentively.

"The cave of the temple is a great way in," he went on. "The path turns to the right and left many times and is often wider and narrower. But there is only one path. From the other side of the temple there are many, many tunnels and passages, but only one reaches to the open. In them you would get lost. I know many of them, but even I do not know them all. If you are hard-pressed and have to retreat keep backing in this passage and you will be safe. Many at a time can not attack you in the narrow places."

"How can we tell friend from foe in this awful darkness?" Nattrass inquired thoughtfully.

"You can not," the witch-doctor told him. "That is one reason why you have bare feet. It is for your safety. They, too, can not tell and will hesitate to strike."

The six whites were in it to a finish, but the more they saw of it the more like a finish it looked. As the Kafir proceeded they liked it still less.

"When we get to the edge of the great temple," he continued, "I shall take you one at a time and hide you each separately where no prowling man will think to find you. Each being alone, you can not talk. There until the fires for the sacrifice are lighted you must stay hidden and keep still. You may breathe and that is all."

"Can't even scratch, eh?" Galt suggested grimly. "And how is each man to know where the others are?"

"You will not know, *M'Lungu*. When the white missis is brought out to be burned the fires will be lighted. As you rush out you will see each other."

"You bet we'll be out quick enough," Thornton asserted.

"But not too quick, *M'Lungu*," the witch-doctor warned. "One man alone too soon will be instantly killed and the others perhaps caught and tortured. When I, standing at the side of the *M'Limo*, raise both hands a second time above my head then all rush out together. From now silence."

In the solid, impenetrable, inky blackness each man felt for the other. Each man gripped the hand of the other. Silently they gripped—the grip men give but seldom in their lives.

"All right; we are ready," said Thornton with a catch in his throat.

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The witch-doctor moved ahead, the whites followed, each man touching the man before him. Still twisting and turning as before, they pushed slowly but steadily on. At times the earth was soft and sandy; again it was rocky and covered with sharp stones. But always the roof was high above their heads. Occasionally Thornton reached out a hand for the walls beside him. At times his hands touched solidity close to him; at others they felt into vacancy.

Up and down the path progressed for it seemed at least a half-mile. Each man's breathing to the others sounded like a burst of steam. The way became smoother. Instinctively all felt they had left the passageway and were standing at the side of a vast cave or room.

The witch-doctor halted. The whites came to a dead stop with him. Pressing one man after the other, he pushed them softly aside and backed them against a wall; then, separating Thornton from the others, led him off.

In two or three minutes he returned, unerringly placed a hand on Galt and led him away. In another few minutes he came back directly to Nattrass and touched him gently. Ten minutes after they had come in all six were securely hidden from any prying eyes and just as equally and completely hidden from one another.

In the intense, velvety darkness the witch-doctor left them. In utter deathly silence he vanished into the deeper recesses of the mountain.

In the awful black depths of the earth the stillness was fearful. So far in from daylight no small life existed—Galt's fear was needless. The hours drifted on, each longer than a whole day.

Soon each man struggled not to yawn; each struggled to keep awake; the temptation to sleep was almost overwhelming. There was no chance to tell the time, no means of knowing when morning came, no way to tell when things would begin to happen. Suspense—the agony of suspense and to keep alert when mind and body shrieked for rest. Again and again one or the other painfully stifled the rising temptation to shout. Utter, utter loneliness. The thought of men bricked up alive by barbarians of old passed more than once through each man's mind.

The unending hours crawled by. No man had heard the slightest sound made by another. None knew in what direction either lay. It must be morning; it seemed a week they'd been there.

Far, far away a flickering light appeared. It grew bright, came closer. A witch-doctor came slowly out of a passage two hundred feet away and entered the ponderous temple. A witch-doctor dressed like the one who had brought them in, but far more hideous, approached, carrying in one hand a burning wisp of twigs and grass. In the other hand was a second wisp unlighted. With eyes searching carefully he slowly walked the whole distance round the great cave, peering intently in every direction. Blinking in the uncertain light the whites cautiously looked away up for the roof. No roof was visible. The circuit finished, the witch-doctor went out the way he had come. All was again darkness.

The minutes passed—perhaps an hour. Another witch-doctor approached, carrying a flaming brand. He, too, leisurely made the rounds and disappeared again.

And then for hours there was unbroken stillness.

In the dense blackness a faint glow commenced to creep along. From a score or more of passages were signs of light approaching. In each passage walked a witch-doctor carrying a flaming torch.

The lights came closer; the men stood in the open; the vast vault was lighted up. Still the watching whites could not detect the roof. The cave was so stupendous that the roof was hundreds of feet above them.

The witch-doctors closed in and steadily came almost together, forming a ring. In the center of the ring lay two great piles of dry firewood. Silently the witch-doctors walked around them. Several times they walked around. In utter silence, save for their cat-like footfall, they made their march. The pace grew quicker, grew to an amble, a trot, a rush. Then frantically they chased along, leaping, twisting, spinning, contorting. Round and round and round. The race became weird, ghastly, demoniac. The flaming torches smoked and sparkled and burned them and still they kept on heedlessly. Round and round and round. Monkey skins flapped, leopard skins flapped, ostrich feathers streamed and waved. No sound; nothing but the clinking together of copper armlets and leglets, the *pad-pad-pad* of toughened feet.

The hidden watchers grew weary of

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watching. The continual circling made them dizzy. And still the hideous mob raced on. One by one the torches burned out. It became darker. It became gloomy. As one man the rushing ring stopped, stood still. As one man the white-faced one another; as one man each raised his right foot.

Together the feet came down on the solid earth with a resounding smack.

"*Ough*," came in a half-cough, half-bark from each witch-doctor's throat.

FROM the end of one of the passages opposite the white men a tall witch-doctor stepped boldly. Fastened each side of the top of his head were the black horns of a goat. Beneath his chin were the long whiskers of a billy-goat. Round his neck were strings of monkey teeth human teeth, dried snakes and lizards, human bones and amulets. His upper arms were encircled with armlets and strips of monkey skin, his body, but for streaks of paint, perfectly nude.

With three or four huge leaps he advanced to the ring of witch-doctors, which opened to receive him. More slowly behind him Thornton's Kafir danced in. And more slowly still behind him appeared a small knot of witch-doctors leading or carrying white goats, white sheep, white fowls and a white calf.

The witch-doctors, holding their animals or fowls, entered the ring and waited, silently looking toward their high priest who was now standing and writhing his sinuous body as if to music.

Soon the writhing stopped and the *M'Limo* stood still. Quietly and slowly he commenced recounting the wrongs the whites in the north had committed and the danger there was of their overrunning the Kafir's country and taking all they owned and keeping them in slavery. With great detail and precision he recounted all the possible and impossible ills that this would lead to.

And as he proceeded the quiet voice grew louder, angrier, vicious—then furious.

For an illimitable time it seemed he kept on more and more vigorously shrieking threats at the world in general, yet never once praying or making any sort of suggestion as to how to make things better.

The shrieking voice broke to a chant. The witch-doctor started walking round and round inside the ring of Kafirs. The walk turned to a trot, a run, then a wild rush. Chanting he raced and leaped, leaped and twisted.

Abruptly the chanting stopped. Just like the other witch doctors he raised one foot as for a stride, raised it in front of where the sacrifices were waiting.

"*Ough*," he coughed hoarsely as he crashed it to the ground.

A witch-doctor handed him a knife, another a fowl, four witch-doctors put torches to the corners of one of the piles of dry wood. Quickly the wood blazed up.

The *M'Limo* dreamily stood before it, stood as if looking at something in the flames. Then he looked above him far into the darkness of the towering roof. And he held the fowl high, high above his head

"O Great Spirit, O *M'Limo*, whose earthly form and humble servitor I am. Grant that these vile, leprous whites, these vermin of the lowest hell, may be swept from our fair country as the morning mist before the the sun."

Swiftly his hands came down. With a sweep the fowl's head was severed and fell gasping and gaping to the floor. Its blood fell streaming in a little pool.

"O *M'Limo*," he went on. "Wipe out these whites as I have wiped away the life of this, thy sacrifice. Make their bullets fall as rain upon our shields. Let our *assegais* burn into them as the fire shall burn this body."

With a twist of his hand he threw the carcass of the fowl into the fire. Then he took another and yet another and after still more furious prayers killed them and cast them into the flames.

The white men watched as if hypnotized but never allowed a sound to leave them. This was no human sacrifice and their anxiety was terrible.

In time the fowls were all killed and the witch-doctor took the sheep one by one and raised them above his head with prayers and incantations, then cut their throats. Next he killed the goats and threw them, too, into the fire. Only the calf remained.

The *M'Limo* hesitated as if for want of breath. Witch-doctors had been busily tying the calf's legs together and now threw it on the ground. There it lay blinking innocently with fearing eyes at its surroundings.

The *M'Limo* stepped back from it.

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Holding his hands in the air above him, he commenced again.

"O *M'Limo*, father of the world, cast thine eyes on us, thy lowest subjects. Take to thyself the sacrifice we offer thee. Destroy, as this is destroyed, the white scum from amongst us."

Stopping, he clapped his hands. From one of the passages hitherto unnoticed by the whites four witch-doctors marched slowly, bearing on their shoulders a black-draped altar. As they approached the helpless calf was handed to him.

Fiercely he cast it, alive and struggling feebly, into the fire.

"And so shall all white —— die," he wildly howled.

The calf shrieked, squealed, screamed as the flames licked round it. Frantically it writhed to free itself, fought to unfasten its legs. But the thongs held long enough and a horrible wriggling was all that it could manage. In a few moments quivering muscles were the only sign that the thing had lived.

The four witch-doctors with the altar on their shoulders approached the other and yet unlighted fire, reached it and laid their burden down upon it.

The black draping was a kaross of softly brayed goat skins which showed every contour of what was lying beneath it. And beneath it was outlined the perfect body of a human being.

Galt's and Nattrass' stomachs went sick and their brains went cold. Thornton's heart almost stood still.

THE witch-doctors stood aside and the *M'Limo* came up. Again he raised his hands above him and looked toward the invisible roof. Again he prayed his furious prayers.

"O *M'Limo*," he shrieked. "Burn out the hearts of all white people as I, thy servant, shall burn out the heart of this one. May they end in torment as the body of this foul one shall end."

At a sign two witch-doctors flicked away the kaross. Beneath, fastened to the top of the wooden altar, was a clean-picked skeleton. Only the face was left and that preserved but crudely. The skull bore long brown hair.

Each of the four men placed a torch at either corner of the pile of wood.

In racking horror Thornton raised his head into view utterly regardless of the fearful consequences it might entail. His witch-doctor, standing behind the *M'Limo*, was looking straight to where he was. The witch-doctor had expected it. His eyes bore a message.

The crowd of witch-doctors raised their hands above their heads and called on the Great Spirit just as the *M'Limo* had called. Thornton noticed eagerly that his witch-doctor's right hand held a knife as it was raised. The hands came down and for a moment all broke into a loud, monotonous, haunting chant. The hands went up again. As they came down the hands of one witch-doctor remained up.

Thornton sprang from his hiding-place with a bound. At almost the same instant his friends were beside him.

The mob of hideous men turned as one man. For a moment they stood as if rooted to the spot in utter bewilderment. And that moment was their undoing. Ghosts or the Great Spirit himself could not have struck them with greater surprize or terror.

But for knives most of them were unarmed. One or two carried native battle-axes. The *M'Limo* still had his sacrificial knife. Furiously he raised it and took the first step of a rush forward. The hands of Thornton's witch-doctor fell and a knife crashed through the *M'Limo's* back.

Confusion was instant. Galt and Nattrass fired quickly but carefully; the police beside them dutifully and happily did their share, while Thornton, firing, ran recklessly forward and kicked the fire from around the altar with his bare feet.

The witch-doctors, knives threatening, started to close around him and he shot his way back. Howls and curses went up. Curses of the priests, screams of the wounded and dying. There was no mercy and no cause for mercy.

The flaming torches were thrown away and smoldered out. Only the light from the one heap of wood remained and that glowed steadily brighter.

A man threw himself at Thornton. Thornton missed and man and he went down struggling. Still struggling, he sensed more than saw his own witch-doctor pouring water on the fire. Darkness filled with clouds of steam. Thornton shot his man with the muzzle of his revolver six inches from him.

To shoot more was madness; friend and

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foe were mixed on silent feet. Each man had his hunting-knife and used it freely. Only by feel and smell and the sound of jingling leglets could the Kafirs be distinguished.

Desperately each man fought—Thornton with calculated carelessness. And as is mostly the case with carelessness his fighting told.

A jingling body passed him close in front. He struck wickedly at it and missed. And as he missed a voice he knew and yet was sure he did not know very distinctly whispered, "We've got the altar."

Instinctively, yet blindly, Thornton rushed for the passageway. His body came in contact with a charging man. For moments they fought till his knife found a home. Then on again.

With throat and heart almost bursting with anxiety Thornton aimed in the direction of the sounds of fighting. His friends were retreating down the passage up which they had come in. In the darkness he staggered after them and attacked the witch-doctors from behind. In intense surprize that all the whites were not in front of them, those he had not struck down turned to grapple with him. Crouching he charged, and charging landed. Next moment he was through them and calling to his friends ahead and feeling his way to where he heard them moving.

The few remaining witch-doctors hesitated. Thornton had time to reload. First backing away, then halting at a sound, now and then firing at random, he made his way toward the entrance to the passage. Twenty minutes later faint streaks of light began to creep in. A corner, and the light was bright enough to see by. A few seconds and he was out and blinking in the full strength of daylight. And as he came out a crowd of the Mounted Police ranged up in front of him and fired steadily back into the passageway.

Thunderstruck and speechless at finding such a host of reinforcements, Thornton stood to collect his thoughts. A policeman gripped him by the shoulder and twisted him round. Mute but grinning, the policeman pointed to the flat space down below.

Still blinking stupidly, Thornton looked.

There, surrounded by yet many more police, a number of strangers and his five friends, was the altar. Kneeling at the side of it and working busily at it with a knife was the witch-doctor.

And the police didn't interfere!

Thornton's feet were his last trouble in the world. He was down the rocky slope like a mountain-goat. In a second he was charging through the police. Firmly they held him back.

The witch-doctor gave up working at the sides of the altar and attacked the top. Carefully he examined the skeleton. Then calmly he started knocking pieces of it away with his knife.

And still the police didn't interfere!

Thornton yelled. The police held him securely.

The witch-doctor laid down his knife and began feeling hurriedly among the remaining bones. From the feet up he methodically lifted, turned or twisted each individual piece. Nothing resulted.

The witch-doctor hesitated in puzzled suspense and looked at the head. Very rudely he attempted to force open the jaws. They were closed—closed immovably. Again he wrenched fiercely, and as he wrenched at them his eyes commenced to glow. Something was giving. Without the slightest compunction he twisted the whole head completely at a right angle.

Slowly the top of the wooden altar rose sidewise like the lid of a box. Next instant the witch-doctor had stooped over and gently lifted out the limp body of an unconscious girl. And as he lifted her he kissed her—actually kissed her full on the lips.

Yet the Mounted Police didn't interfere!

Thornton stood utterly paralyzed. Things had happened so quickly—things so unbelievably impossible to his way of thinking—that his will-power was numb. All he could do was passively look on in speechless bewilderment.

A trooper had previously removed a blanket from his horse and laid it on the ground. Another had procured water. An officer produced a flask.

The witch-doctor laid the limp body softly down and bathed the girl's forehead, his eyes all the while glowing with an extraordinary pleasure. In a few minutes the girl opened her eyes and smiled, then peacefully closed them again.

With his right hand the witch-doctor tore a strip from his loin-cloth and dipped it in the water. With his left he reached

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to his head and quickly pulled away the ostrich-feather head-dress. His whole woolly scalp came away with it. The monkey-skin beard was swept off. Hurriedly he rubbed the wet cloth a dozen or more times over his clay-painted face.

The girl's eyes opened again and remained open. Her bare arms came wearily yet eagerly up. The witch-doctor bent low over her. The arms went round his neck. Rapturously she kissed him on lips and cheeks and forehead.

"Father," she softly murmured.

IN THE dining-room at Hulin's mine the whole party was sitting round a table. A very much needed meal had just been dutifully handled.

"What beats me," Hulin was saying to his daughter, "is where they kept you all the time. I could never find you."

"No wonder," Cecile told him, "I didn't see daylight for weeks on end."

"When I first heard of it all," Hulin went on, "and got word how the coach and mules had been found I quickly thought I saw how matters stood. I knew you'd never been washed away by any accident. And the information that came after the police investigation assured me that no white man had had a hand in it.

"At the same time, other than the assagaing of the mules, it didn't seem like the work of Kafirs. All that remained were the Portuguese half-castes.

"The only way I could see to get to the bottom of it was to disguise as a witch-doctor—practically to become one. And my thirty years of wandering amongst the Kafirs and knowledge of their dialects and habits made that easy. As you all know when a white man understands any Kafir language he usually speaks it better than the natives themselves, because he speaks it with brains.

"I put my scheme before Colonel Morgan of the police and he, knowing Kafirs just as well as I do, fell in with it completely. As he said, if the girl was still alive and the Portuguese were arrested simply on suspicion she would instantly be put out of the way forever. And afterward when I found that the *M'Limo* had her he agreed that a police search of the caves would mean just the same thing.

"All I had to do was dye my skin slightly and get the necessary rig out and by a little strategy and out-faking the fakirs, work myself in as a witch-doctor from another tribe. They're just as much in awe of a strange witch-doctor as the Kafirs are of them."

One of the civilian strangers, smiling approval, broke in.

"To me, as an American, such a thing would have seemed impossible only a year ago," he commented, "but since I've been out here and seen that Kafir forms and features are just as diversified as are those of white races I can easily understand it."

Hulin laughed.

"Certainly. Why, amongst my own blacks at this very mine I've one man as red-headed as the very fightingest Irishman there ever was. But the Portuguese. It didn't take long to find that the Portuguese half-castes were at the back of the whole trouble. Though I'll give them their due—they only stumbled into it.

"They, with a crowd of their retainers, were caught in the same storm as the coach and not very far from the coach. The idea immediately came into their heads to loot the coach and do away with the passengers and all living evidence. But when they found Cecile they imagined they'd struck a windfall. For very good reasons those Portuguese looked on me as a deadly enemy of theirs, which was one reason why I couldn't go to them and question them directly. And there was Cecile defenseless and ready for them to use against me.

"After that they couldn't kill the other passengers because of her. Their main idea, once I came back into the country, was to torture me by fear for her life and eventually get the biggest ransom that I could stand, and of course it would never have done for her to be free with the knowledge of so many murders against them. So the Portuguese took all the men alive, drove the coach down the bank and, as the mules hit the water, the Kafirs assagaied them.

"The rebellion against the whites had just broken out in the North and the half-castes unhesitatingly gave all the white men to the *M'Limo* on condition he kept Cecile safe and in hiding till they could use her.

"All the men were butchered 'trying to escape.'"

Thornton was listening with evident restlessness.

"Why didn't you tell me all this long ago?" he asked.

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"Tell you?" Hulin laughed heartily. 'Tell an impetuous man who is crazily n love and let him rush in and bust up hings when the business in hand may take ong, weary months?"

Thornton grinned sheepishly.

"Nothing crazy about it," he said.

"No, I couldn't tell you," Hulin continued. "You see, Thornton, I am her father and to me the world revolves only for her. Right to the very last minute I kept up the character. I knew that the only possible way to be quite sure my plans would not be interfered with was to hold you people firmly away from me. To be the only one who knew so that you would be forced to depend on me."

Again Thornton grinned.

"Thinking back, I believe I agree with you," he admitted thoughtfully.

Hulin smiled.

"It was easy enough to mix with the witch-doctors," he went on, "but no amount of adroit questioning ever produced the faintest inkling as to where Cecile was hidden. And I could search those rabbit-warrens of caves for a year without result. That was why I transferred my investigations back to the Portuguese. You saved my life," he added seriously, holding out his hand to Thornton.

Thornton took the outstretched hand.

"I suppose I did," he laughed. "But I was so darned busy at the time saving my own that I don't think I deserve any thanks for it."

"Then all you could do was wait patiently in the hope she would some day be produced?" Galt suggested, addressing Hulin.

"Exactly," Hulin agreed. "And then to my horror I found that the first and only occasion on which they were going to produce her was when they were going to burn her. The rebellion was failing and the *M'Limo* thought Cecile would be of more value to the Great Spirit as a sacrifice than to the Portuguese. Thank God she never heard what was to happen to her until the very moment when she was in the temple and on the fire."

"Thank God a thousand times," Thornton echoed deeply.

Hulin help up his hand and shook an admonishing finger at Thornton playfully.

"Let *you* know!" he said once more. "Why, outside of Colonel Morgan even the police didn't know who I was and none but the three who came with us knew what was happening until they got into the hills at midday today."

Nattrass had been sitting with his head on his hands apparently thinking very seriously. Most of the conversation appeared to have completely missed him.

"What *I'm* puzzling about," he suddenly burst out, "is how we can do the most to those blasted Portuguese."

Hulin turned to him merrily.

"We can't do a single thing," he said. "It's done. The *M'Limo* made certain they'd never again need Cecile. They were sacrificed at midday yesterday."

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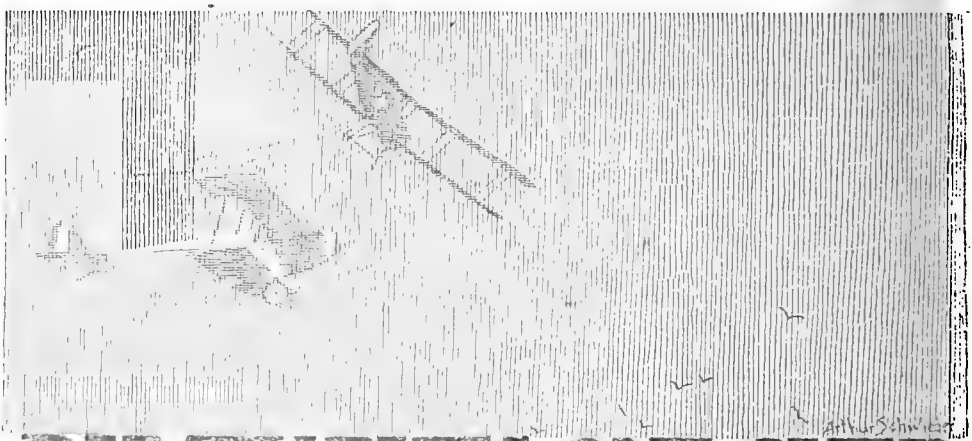

DUMPY PUTS ONE OVER

By Thomson Burtis

Author of "Mission Successfully Completed."

THIS is the story of how Robert, "Dumpy" Scarth, of the Army Air Service, achieved his fondest ambition. Not in its full perfection, perhaps, because the newspapers did not run his name in their headlines, nor did languishing damsels write him offering their hearts and hands, as happened to Davidson and Marsh when they were captured by Mexican bandits and held for ransom. The Army authorities kept it under cover. Nevertheless, Dumpy's name was whispered throughout the Air Service as the hero of an exploit; crazy enough to be funny, daring enough to be admired, skilful enough to enhance his reputation greatly.

Dumpy was that rarest of specimens—a hot-air artist with an overdeveloped ego who could actually make his boasting good. He was short, with a pronounced inclination to obesity, and likewise homely and good-natured. His tongue ran on well-oiled ball bearings and it ever sang a song of the surpassing skill of its owner. And because Dumpy Scarth was probably as good a pilot as the Air Service boasted, and in addition could sing tenor, strum a wicked ukulele, and was possessed of endless good nature the gang at Marfa let him get away with it. In reality, he was actually popular.

Nevertheless his craze for publicity and admiration was almost a disease. He was like a child, so naively frank was he in his conceit. Every time one of his fellow flyers found himself in the limelight temporarily, Bobby was in the dumps—not that he begrudged the other man his success, but because he hadn't thought of doing it himself. When Gordon jumped twenty thousand feet in a parachute Bobby cursed his own stupidity in not doing it long before. Lanky Hub Chester flew thirteen hundred miles and back on a special mission in two days, elapsed time, and twenty-one hours flat flying time for another record and Dumpy raved because he hadn't been given the chance.

Then came George Wadbury, who carried three passengers up twenty thousand feet for an altitude record. Scarth took his head in his hands as he read the newspaper account of it. Despite the fact that he risked his neck a dozen times a month to "grandstand," and tired his brain trying to think of something noteworthy to accomplish in the flying game, somehow or other he always missed. The Air Service knew that he was a bang-up pilot, but when he went up to San Antonio for a few days civilians didn't point him out and say—

"There goes Scarth!"

Then came his chance, or rather, he made his chance. He achieved a surreptitious kind of fame, passed on from lip to lip until

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it spread from the Gulf to California, and far up from the southern fields to the Air Service clan in the north, and out to the Philippines and Hawaii. Miscellaneously scrambled together in the hodge-podge are Crane Simon, formerly of the flying corps, and Señor Capitán José de Valero, Mexican officer and aeronautical enthusiast.

CRANE SIMON did not want to go to war. When he found he had to, he decided to become a flying cadet. Simon always had had a keen eye for the main chance. With characteristic cold logic he figured that flying was the coming thing, and that inasmuch as he must enter the Army he might as well learn to fly at government expense.

Being a professional gambler he was not lacking in either nerve or brains. Consequently he was successful in his efforts. With the aid of letters of recommendation from two powerful political lights in the city of New York he entered ground school, passed on to flying training, and two weeks before the armistice was signed was commissioned in the Air Service.

One week later "Bugs" Bartlett, after attentively watching him deal stud poker, decided that the slim, hard-faced Simon was positively uncanny in his knowledge of the hole-cards of the other players. An hour later he discovered, through steady observation, that on Simon's deal there were always five cards on top of the deck that were never moved in the shuffle. The secret of Simon's luck in never betting into a higher hand than his own was solved.

So it happened that three months in close arrest followed for the debonair Simon, two months and three weeks of it being after the practical, although not official, ending of the war. Those three months were endless æons of humiliation and bitter brooding for the gambler. The general court martial dishonorably discharged him. And Colonel Mills, commanding officer of Donovan Field, and president of the court, delivered to him a stinging verbal flagellation that made even the case-hardened crook wince. His first day as a civilian found him in the C. O.'s office.

With steel and ice in his level voice Simon threw a parting shot at the gray-headed, belligerent colonel.

"And some day I'll get you—get you so that you'll be using your time explaining things to Washington for the rest of your life. Mark me, I never forget and I'll humiliate you and make you a laughing-stock if it puts me in jail!"

And his was not an empty warning. One of Simon's long suits was remembering a grudge. The things he had endured during those last months in the Army, increased largely by Colonel Mills' bitter contempt, were burned into his mind, never to be erased. And the memory still made him clench his hands in cold, snake-like rage.

THUS it came about that a year after his interview with Colonel Mills, when the January races at New Orleans had ended, leaving Mr. Simon with a very respectable roll of cash, he decided to run over to San Antonio and look over the land. After much thought he made a proposition to "Pinky" Samuels and Ike Bernmen, to whom the races had not been so good. Both being dead-broke, in fact, it was easy to attach them as underlings.

Simon knew that Colonel Mills was still in command at Donovan Field. Few others of the old crowd would be left, though, and he was not widely known by sight even to the old-timers. In his immaculate, well-cut civilian clothes he would be safe from detection, he felt, even out on the field.

So for the first two weeks in February a good-looking albeit somewhat hard-faced young man occasionally lounged around the flying field at the Mechanics School, on Number One Field. Little by little, from many different men, he unobtrusively picked up various interesting items of information about whether they filled the ships in the afternoon for the next day's flying, what the guard system was, and other matters. Pinky and Ike likewise did their bit with Air Service enlisted men in town, as to what the average flying time to the Mexican border was, and divers things they needed in their business.

When the trio had completed their investigations, Simon took train for Laredo, having in his pocket a certain newspaper clipping regarding the aeronautical activities of one Captain José de Valero, of the Mexican Army. According to the newspaper account Captain Valero had taken a course in flying at a prominent school on the Florida coast, had purchased two training planes, and had constructed a small flying field just outside of Chihuahua City.

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The clipping also mentioned the fact that Señor Valero was using every effort to persuade the Mexican government to foster military aviation. Simon also carried with him a few sheets of notepaper bearing the letterhead of the Aero Club of America. He had wired a New York pal of his for that before leaving New Orleans.

At Laredo he paid a public stenographer the sum of two dollars to use her typewriter a few moments. On the Aero Club letterhead he typed out a cordial recommendation for Mr. James Simmons, of the American Airplane Selling Corporation. It was addressed to whom it might concern, and spoke highly of the moral and financial status of the A. A. S. C., as well as its representative, Mr. James Simmons. Simon, after completing the letter, scrawled a signature purporting to be that of the president of the Aero Club.

The day following he had obtained passports, crossed to Nueva Laredo and taken train for Chihuahua City, *via* Monterey. Immediately upon his arrival he requested, by special messenger, an audience with Captain José de Valero on business connected with aeronautics.

It so happened that the young Mexican received the message as he was preparing to be driven to the home of the commandant. Consequently he saved the American the trouble of making a call by coming to the hotel himself. Simon received the tall, darkly handsome young Mexican in his room and produced adequate quantities of *aguadiente* and expensive American cigarets. To the gambler's delight Captain Valero spoke excellent English, which saved much trouble and some little danger.

"Captain," Simon opened up when cigarets were going well and his credentials had been read by the Mexican, "I understand that you are one of those international sportsmen of the air—that you are the outstanding figure of Mexico in the greatest game in the world!"

The gorgeous Mexican, despite his obvious pleasure in these flowery remarks, waved a deprecating hand.

"*Si, señor*, in my humble way I strive to make my country——"

"Just so," pursued Simon. "I understand that there are a few old training-model airplanes in Mexico, of which you own two personally. Am I right?"

"You are," admitted Valero, gazing fixedly at his patent-leather boots, with their great silver spurs. "Some day, however, his Excellency has promised that we shall arrange for the building of the modern ships—power, speed!"

His great dark eyes flamed with enthusiasm at the prospect.

"That's what I'm here for. How would you like to have delivered to you, at your own field, a ship like one of those you see flying the border patrol for the United States? Complete with Liberty motor, tools, extra wheels, accessories? Flown to you, mind, completely equipped, even to radio?"

"If we only could! But my country, she is——"

"My company has invested in millions of dollars' worth of ships of all modern types, many of them purchases from the government after the armistice. They have been overhauled and are in perfect condition. If you are not satisfied with your ship—and so accomplished a birdman as yourself, captain, would at once discover any flaw—you need not take it. And to prove my good faith, and that the ship is good, I, myself, shall fly it to you. Like you, I am an aviator."

"It is too good a chance!" exclaimed the volatile young officer, springing to his feet. "I shall wire the minister at once!"

He sprang to his feet exuberantly, but Simon's cool tones interrupted further outbursts of enthusiasm.

"Pardon me, captain. It will be impossible for me to remain, much as I would like to, later than tonight. It will be worth much to me and my company to secure an *êntre* through you to your government. You are a wealthy man, *señor*, and it would be hard to convince your government by wire. Why not buy the plane yourself, captain?

"Then when the populace and the government officials see you roaring through the air a hundred—a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour they will be convinced. They would buy the plane from you, and perhaps many others from my company. And if you should desire we will make you, personally, a low price. You can buy them and obtain a legitimate profit for your trouble by being the airplane broker between us and your government."

Valero, fired by enthusiasm and actuated a little by cupidity likewise, was in a

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eptive mood. After much *aguadiente* and
ny cigarets he was finally persuaded by
adroit Simon. A hasty agreement was
wn up and signed which provided that
the sum of twelve thousand dollars in
ierican currency the American Airplane
ling Corporation was to deliver one com-
te De Haviland Four airplane, complete
h tools and accessories, to Valero Field,
ihuahua, Mexico, by air. The purchase
ce was to be turned over to Mr. James
nmons, in person, immediately upon
eptance of the plane. Furthermore, de-
ery was to be made in four days.

As they drove to the station Captain Va-
o became more and more imbued with
iadiente-inspired brotherly love for his
low airman from America. On the platf-
m he tearfully wrung the cynically
iling crook's hand and begged him always
remember that José de Valero was his
end and that together they would urge on
exico until she had her sky darkened with
e airplanes. To which Simon gravely
reed and did some affectionate hand-
aking himself.

As the bumpy train drew out of the ram-
ackle station he took a last look at the
shing, if somewhat unsteady, figure on
e platform, still saluting good-bys.

"With the aid of that red, blue and green
mic opera Spig I collect ten thousand, net,
d likewise get that old —— Mills in
atch," he mused as he settled himself for
e dreary trip to Monterey. "Two birds
th one stone and likewise virtue is its own
ward."

With which highly Biblical reflection he
ll asleep.

MR. JOHN CARLSON, a well-dressed, clean-cut young man of about thirty, registered at the St. nthony Hotel in San Antonio two days ter. He immediately telephoned to a om at the Menger Hotel, and to another the Gunter. As a result a small, sharp-ced young man visited Mr. Carlson fifteen inutes later. A half-hour afterward an-her inconspicuous chap lounged into the t. Anthony, and shortly appeared in Mr. arlson's room. Mr. Carlson, otherwise imon, immediately plunged into his story.

"And the beauty of it is," he concluded, that we'll rook that Spig with a little luck. Ve'll have the ship filled with gas at his eld. We'll get hold of the kale, and then I'll offer to demonstrate the qualities of the good ship by taking off with you two and showing it off a little. When we take off, we'll beat it east, get out of sight, circle around west and make for Guaymas, which is on the Gulf of California only a hundred and seventy miles away. Boats touch there often. If it's cloudy they can't trace us. If it isn't we'll go high and trust to luck.

"Valero won't get wise until we're gone from Guaymas, anyway. There's only one thing that can stop us and that's motor failure. That Liberty, however, plugs away world without end, amen, and the Mechanics School motors are always in A1 shape. That's their business over there."

Pinky Samuels, his red hair sticking up in spike-like bunches, blew a contemplative smoke-ring at the ceiling.

"If New Orleans hadn't cleaned me, a hundred a week and that thousand bonus wouldn't have a chance of getting me in on this stunt," he stated. "But I'll have to dip the old kelly to you, Crane. You're some little schemer."

"The question is, is he some little flyer?" inquired Ike Bernmen.

"Pretty fair, Ike," returned Simon with his thin-lipped smile.

"If I hadn't seen these crazy boys from the field jazzin' around so much I'd be worse scared than I am," remarked Pinky. "I got kinda used to the idea now. You're not figuring on doin' any o' them spins and things are you, Crane?"

"Nary a one. Well, let's cut the confab and get down to bedrock. We pull the job tomorrow morning at five A.M., just before daylight."

The three closed in together, and for the next hour talked absorbedly. Then one by one they drifted out, to go their separate ways until the hour struck.

PRIVATE WHITE flogged himself briskly with his arms. It was sure cold for Texas. And it was the coldest time of the night, too. Quarter of five, according to his big nickel watch. He resumed his march around the three big hangars which housed the flying department of the Mechanics School. Down the road came three men, hurrying like mad.

"Halt!" yelled Private White, jerking out his gun.

"Officer of the post and two enlisted men," came the sharp answer.

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"Advance to be recognized!" bellowed the soldier.

He congratulated himself that the officer wasn't catching him, if he was only a rookie. He had sure studied that guard-book!

A tall man in helmet and goggles, leather coat and the breeches and puttees of an officer approached.

"I am Lieutenant Carlson, from the other field," he snapped. "We just got word that a ship that didn't get back yesterday is cracked up near Spofford. I've got to go down and bring the passenger, who is badly hurt, back to the base hospital. Here is an order from Major Stratton to use ship 23558. Your hangar keeps the motor warmer, so we can start easier. That's the reason we're taking a ship from here. Shake it up, now, and help us out!"

With a rush the speaker and two men in the coveralls of mechanics made for the canvas sides of the hangar, quickly cut the tie-ropes and folded back the canvas.

The puzzled White watched them in a daze, his gun forgotten in his hand. This was certainly a funny circumstance. It didn't look quite right to him, and yet——

"—— it, shake a leg!" roared the lieutenant, and the rookie leaped to obey. That was about all he had learned to do so far in the Army—jump when an officer gave an order.

With Simon urging them on, the three put the dolly under the tail of the big De Haviland, and quickly rolled it out on the line.

"Get blocks, you!" he commanded White.

Before climbing in the cockpit, he looked around and listened keenly. The great field lay quietly all around him. Not a sound broke the stillness. Over in the east a faint grayness was beginning to show, but otherwise it was dark as pitch.

Blocks under the wheels, Simon crawled in the front cockpit. The gas-tank was full, so was the oil. He breathed a sigh of relief. That saved valuable time. Quickly he pumped up the air, turned on the gas and made sure that the switches were off.

"Off!" he called to the three men out front. They turned the propeller several times and then set it. Simon had instructed his henchmen well.

"Contact!" said Pinky in guarded tones.

Simon snapped on one switch.

"Contact!"

The three men, each holding to the wrist of the man between him and the prop, pulled together and swung it. A sputter, but it did not start. A second time they tried, and again it would not go.

"I think she's flooded too much, sir," said Private White, who was not a student at the Mechanics School for nothing.

With throttle open they turned the propeller backward a few times, and then reset it on a good compression point. Again they swung and with a roar the Liberty caught. Simon quickly turned on the other switch, advanced the spark and throttled the motor 'way down. A thrill of excitement ran through him as he felt the great machine quivering beneath him. He was going to fly once more, "and for a pretty big stake, too," he told himself.

Now was the time for quick action. The roar of the motor might arouse someone even though the hangar was at the extreme lower end of the field. Pinky and Ike needed no instructions. They both clambered into the back seat, wrenching out the dual control stick, which gave them plenty of room. They loosened the belt with numbed fingers and adjusted it around themselves. Simon jazzed up the motor once.

"Pretty cold yet, but we've got to go!" he thought swiftly, and took a last look at his instruments. Oil-pressure was right—thirty. Voltmeter was charging one and a half, and the air held steady at three. The thermometer showed forty degrees, Centigrade.

"Take away the blocks!" he yelled to White, who obediently crawled under the wings and drew them from the wheels. Louder and louder droned the motor, until it seemed as if it must wake all of Donovan Field. For a moment the ship disappeared in the darkness as it swiftly covered the ground. Then it appeared again, silhouetted black against the lightening eastern sky, and turning, headed southwest.

Private White watched it disappear into the dusk wonderingly. In fact, the more he watched the more he wondered. Gradually his slow-working mind groped to the conclusion that all was not as it should be. In growing panic he telephoned to the guard-house, where hard-boiled Provost Sergeant Hall got the message.

Sergeant Hall arrived on a motorcycle at a perilous rate of speed. With a few brief blasphemous remarks he grabbed the fake pass that White still held and headed

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s motorcycle for the quarters of the pro-ost marshal. Just as it was becoming light e sleepily wrathful Major Stratton was iswering an insistent telephone call from e provost marshal.

Ten minutes later the dozing telephone rl became wildly busy as Donovan Field oke up. Colonel Mills roared and cursed - he walked up and down in his quarters, vaiting the advent of Major Stratton, the ovost marshal, Private White and the erations officer.

At quarter of six o'clock the mystery was isolved, but all along the stations of the rder patrol went a telegram:

"De Haviland Four stolen from Donovan Field A.M. by unknown persons. Headed southwest. nd all available ships up immediately. If stolen ip is picked up follow it unless trail leads into exico. Cover border from McMullen to El Paso. ire immediately all information obtained. Sus-cted that ship is to be delivered in Mexico.

MILLS

AT SEVEN A.M. on the line outside the four steel hangars of the Marfa airdrome, eight De Havilands ere warming up. Shivering mechanics, ostly arrayed in coveralls over pajamas, ere flying around like mad men. Excited lots and observers were clustered together, gerly discussing the mystery. Most of em were inclined to the belief that some yer was winning a bet. No stunt is too azy for some of the young gentlemen of e flying corps when their spirits run a ttle high.

Dumpy Scarth, however, was thinking eeply as he waited for his crew chief to ive the signal that his ship was ready to o. What a gorgeous exploit it would be o bring down that stolen ship! He communicated this sentiment to Hinkley, his bserver. Hinkley was as tall as Dumpy as short, and as sardonic as Dumpy was ood-natured.

"Outside o' the fact that there's five undred miles of border he can hit besides he place we'll be, and that you'll be tried or murder if you shoot him down, you've ot a good chance to be a hero, Dumpy," emarked Hink, pulling the belt of his flying-uit tighter around his lathe-like form.

"I'll bet my hat he's delivering a ship to ome Spig and I saw a newspaper item bout there being some guy that built a ield at Chihuahua for a couple of old ennies he's got," argued Dumpy earnestly. "He could make Chihuahua from Donovan on one tank, too."

"Well, suppose that's the truth—what are you going to do about it?"

Dumpy didn't know. Abstractedly he started to inspect the elevator control wires leading alongside the fuselage. He turned his back to the wind of the propeller, and absent-mindedly ran his hands over the cable. By chance he caught sight of the lead "fish," hanging just under the bottom of the fuselage. This weight is attached to the end of the wire from which radio is sent from a plane in the air.

The wire, about two hundred feet long, is reeled on a spool in the observer's cockpit when the radio is not in use. When it is used, the observer unwinds the wire, or antenna, and with the aid of the weight on the end the speed of the plane causes the wire to stream out behind for its full distance.

With the sight of this fish an idea flashed into Dumpy's nimble brain. He communicated it to the scoffing Hinkley, his round face shining with excitement. After much vehement argument Hinkley finally grinned and admitted—

"It's possible, Dumpy, but —— improbable!"

"Never you mind! We'll get close to his course for Chihuahua, and you keep your eye peeled! When I tell you to unreel that antenna, do it *pronto!*"

One by one the great ships taxied to the end of the small airdrome, and took off, each to find its assigned sector of the Rio Grande. From McMullen, Sanderson, Del Rio, Laredo and El Paso ships were doing the same.

Dumpy hopped up on the wing of his ship and eased his chubby form into the cockpit. He did not test his switches or even notice his instruments; the crew chief had done it all and time was precious. With a roar he turned on the motor, taxied at breakneck speed to the end of the field and was off.

Characteristically, he did not make a straight take-off. He held the ship two feet off the ground until the buildings were only a few feet ahead, then lifted his ship in a beautiful, breath-taking zoom, turning as he zoomed. Dumpy would grandstand if he had so much as a Chink cook to watch him, as Hinkley once opined. But the little fat flyer handled a ship as a master musician

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his instrument. His reckless acrobatics were the poetry of motion.

He wasted no time now, however, after his first zoom. He pushed the throttle wide open and at seventeen hundred revolutions a minute the eight-foot propeller bit into the air and lifted the ship. Dumpy carefully watched his thermometer, but the air was so cold that his motor kept cool. In five minutes they had reached five thousand feet, the ground dim and gray through the morning mist. Pointed straight for the place where he knew the course of the stolen ship would be, if it was bound for Chihuahua City, Dumpy continued to climb. For the success of his scheme he must have more altitude than the plane he was pursuing.

Ten thousand feet in eleven minutes and Dumpy throttled down. He was twenty miles north of the Rio Grande, directly on the course he figured the stolen ship would fly if bound from Donovan to Chihuahua City. Twenty miles would give him time enough to try his scheme before the stolen ship crossed the river into Mexico. He was high enough. The voltmeter was charging two, oil and air pressures were correct and nothing distracted his attention from thoughts of the opportunity which perhaps, if luck was with him, would be his.

Hinkley, keeping a close watch northeastward, grinned at intervals. The more he thought of Dumpy's scheme, the more possible he thought it was. And it would be an achievement that would arouse admiring hilarity throughout the Air Service.

With anybody else at the stick but Dumpy, chances wouldn't have been so good, the lanky observer soliloquized, but no one knew better than Hink himself just how smooth and accurate a flyer his aerial teammate was. The more he thought about it, the greater became his conviction that if by any wild freak of luck they should sight the stolen ship, Dumpy would put it over.

THE rolling mesquite below them was becoming less blurred now as the mist faded. Hinkley looked steadily to the northeast as Dumpy circled in shallow banks. Suddenly he leaned forward, tense and straining, as his practised eyes discerned a speck against the sky. A few seconds, and it became a certainty. With more excitement than the blasé observer had felt for months he frantically shook the stick in the back seat. Dumpy turned quickly, peering owlishly through the goggles that covered half his fat, round face. Hinkley, grinning like a hyena, pointed toward the rapidly growing speck in the distance. For a moment Dumpy could not pick it up. Then he found it. With deafening suddenness the motor went full on as he gave it the "gun," and the De Haviland's nose once more pointed up, for that ship racing toward them was nearly as high as they were.

When a thousand feet measured the difference in their altitudes Dumpy put his ship directly on the course of the coming plane, throttled down, and motioned Hinkley to unreel the two hundred feet of wire antenna. Throttled down as they were, the stolen ship gained rapidly, until only a mile separated them, Dumpy still a thousand feet above.

The Army pilot flew without watching his ship at all. His eyes were glued on his prey. He was unconscious of the fact that they were flying back toward Marfa now—the Rio Grande was visible ten miles ahead. Now only a couple of thousand feet measured the distance between the two great planes and in a few seconds more the stolen ship flashed by, almost directly underneath its Service sister. Then Dumpy nosed his ship over, leaving the motor at fifteen hundred revolutions. To a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour jumped the airspeed meter, as he made his dive steeper to augment the speed his motor gave him. He had been careful to get a thousand feet more altitude than the other ship so that he could overhaul it easily, jockeying for position the while. Slowly Dumpy gained, coming nearer and nearer the level of the stolen ship.

As for Simon, cold and cramped from the unaccustomed altitude and the strain of flying, he was unruffled. He figured the other ship was trying to get information, but he had expected that the news was out by this time along the border, anyway. They wouldn't shoot, because no one was sure who was in the stolen ship. And when he crossed into Mexico it would do them no good, even if they did know who was in it, which they wouldn't.

Pinky and Ike Bernmen, however, were not so calm. They shook with mingled cold and fright as they watched the pursuing

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plane, terrifying in its might as it swept down and toward them.

DUMPY prepared himself for the effort of his life. He was a curious mixture of pounding excitement and cool skill as he handled his stick. Down farther went the nose—a hundred and fifty miles an hour now, and every strut was shaking and the wires were screeching shrilly.

As he caught the plane ahead his undercarriage was less than ten feet above the level of the lower plane's wing. Dumpy peered steadily over the side, as he put the nose down an inch more. Hinkley, waving his long arms derisively, was standing in the back seat, laughing at the two scared faces in the back seat below. The pilot was hidden by the wing.

Below him now Dumpy could see nothing. He had passed the other plane. Then he turned the throttle full on, and like a shot he pushed his stick 'way forward. In an almost vertical dive his ship hurtled down and directly across the path of the other one. Three seconds and Dumpy turned off the throttle and banked around. He looked around, but could not see the other ship.

Then he saw Hinkley. That long, disconnected, sardonic young gentleman was waving madly and pointing below and to the right of them. Dumpy looked eagerly and then he lifted his voice in a great shout of joy. He couldn't hear it himself, but he had to let out. Below them, with only a few splinters of propeller left, the other ship was gliding toward the ground, nine thousand feet below. He, Dumpy Scarth, had brought down the stolen ship by dragging his antenna and "fish" through the propeller, shattering it!

Again Hink pointed down as Dumpy looked back triumphantly. Then he saw that the other ship was gliding for the airdrome at Marfa. It was the only landing field within ten miles. Dumpy, in his absorption, had not noticed how near home they were. He had figured the other plane would be landing on the Caxon ranch, fifteen miles north. As the full perfection of his luck became obvious, he recklessly pushed on the throttle and at a hundred and forty miles an hour dived for the airdrome.

The other ship was circling widely, coming down slowly. Dumpy landed a full minute ahead of Simon. He leaped from the front cockpit, cutting his switches as he did so, and rushed up to Captain Kendall.

"That's the stolen ship, cap'n!" he gasped. "Get some men with guns around here, quick!"

"That's right, captain!" bellowed Hinkley, his face blazing for once.

The captain had watched with great wonderment the queer duel high above him a few moments before, and now he wasted no time on questions. When Simon landed his lack of experience made him land too fast, and in ground-looping to avoid the fence he cracked a wing. As he crawled out, the half-dead touts with him, he faced five army Colts.

"All right, you've got us," he said coolly and quietly took off his flying-suit. "But what the ——, if I may ask, did that crazy —— fool do to us?"

"Oh, boy!" grinned Hinkley. "He just tagged you with a fish!"

"I don't care what he did," said Pinky through blue lips, as two husky soldiers grabbed him by each arm. "So help me——"

"Oh, shut up and let's go to jail," interrupted Ike sourly. "That's on the ground, anyway!"

And off they went, with a grinning escort of four privates. As for Simon, he went with another escort to the captain's office to tell the tale. Dumpy told his part then, a hundred times more that day, and a thousand times more in the next month. And it was passed from lip to lip by the men of the Air Service, until there was no doubt in anybody's mind that Dumpy had some excuse for admitting that he was good. As Hinkley always concluded when he told the story—

"The Lord was riding on the wing that day, but you gotta give Dumpy credit!"

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GUNS OF THE GODS

A Five Part Story Part II

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Barabbas Island," "In Aleppo Bazaar," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

THE Russian Princess Sonia Omanoff was accused of the murder of her husband and sentenced to life-imprisonment in the Siberian mines. Intriguing friends smuggled her off to Paris. During her subsequent residence there she fell in love with Bubru Singh, a Rajput maharaja on his educational "Grand Tour." She married him and he took her to his kingdom in India. There he died soon after the birth of their daughter, Yasmini. That is the introduction to this story.

Gungadhura Singh, Bubru's nephew, succeeded him as maharaja. The new ruler assigned a palace in Sialpore to Sonia for her personal use, and there the Princess Yasmini was brought up, a child who inherited from her mother all the cunning of Russian court-intriguers and from her father an intense love of India.

In Sialpore the money-lender Mukhum Dass leased a house to Dick Blaine. Blaine was an American mining engineer who had settled in Sialpore at the request of Gungadhura Singh for a mining expert to explore the old gold-workings in the hills. Dick Blaine was about forty; his wife, ten years younger.

Tess Blaine from the start loved India. One dawn she stole from her bed and stood, thinly clad, at her window to wonder at the rich colors of the gorgeous sunrise. After her husband had gone to work, a handsome and dandified young man called, a Rajput of Rajputs. Several slight mannerisms he affected led Tess to detect that her visitor was a woman, an exceedingly pretty young woman, in male attire.

"I am the rightful Maharanee of Sialpore," the girl confessed after admitting her sex, "only those fools of English have given Sialpore to Gungadhura, who is a pig and loathes them."

Their chat was interrupted by the arrival of Tom Tripe. This eccentric fellow was drillmaster of the maharaja's troops and an admirer of the Blaines' democratic hospitality, so unlike the formality of the English residents. The woman in man's garb suddenly produced a Bank of India note for one thousand rupees and a fountain pen and before Tom entered the house scrawled Persian characters on the paper. Tess introduced her to Tom as Gunga Singh, but Tom immediately recognized her and exclaimed:

"So the Princess Yasmini is Gunga Singh this morning, eh? That won't do. I swore on my Bible oath to the maharaja day before yesterday that I'd left you closely guarded in the palace place across the river."

But protesting against the violation of her hospitality to all visitors, Tess refused to allow the drillmaster to take the princess to the palace.

The coming of the commissioner, leading his horse up the hill, spoiled all chances of Tom Tripe's persuading the princess to go with him. She whirled on Chamu, the Blaines' native butler, and accused him of stealing her one-thousand-rupee note.

"Feel in his cummerbund, Tom Tripe," she commanded. "I saw where the money went."

Tom felt in Chamu's sash and from its folds produced the note.

"Go to the palace and tell the maharaja that the princess is at the house of the commissioner *sahib*," she stormed at the terrified butler, while he protested that he was innocent. "And keep the thousand-rupee note to pay thy son's gambling-debt to Mukhum Dass."

Chamu slunk away to do her bidding.

When Commissioner Samson was being entertained on the veranda by Tess and Tom had

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ridden away, Yasmini in the parlor listened to their conversation. The commissioner told Tess of the Sialpore Treasure. This was a vast ancestral hoard buried somewhere in that region. Although Gungadhura knew nothing of its existence, he said, it was the maharaja's rightful inheritance from his ancestors. The secret had died with Bubru Singh. It was generally thought that Blaine had come to Sialpore to search for the Treasure rather than for the gold in the hills.

"Gungadhura Singh is a spendthrift," he declared. "Gungadhura will surely claim the Treasure if your husband finds it."

He also informed Tess of many other local conditions and asked her if they were sure of their lease on the house.

"I've been told there's a question about the title. Some one's bringing suit against your landlord for possession on some ground or other."

After he had gone, Yasmini jubilantly kissed Tess, saying that she behaved perfectly. The princess was sure Samson had a trick up his sleeve.

When Dick returned that night and Tess told him the events of the day, he declared his fidelity to Gungadhura.

Yasmini went to Mukhum Dass. She told the money-lender she knew that he had asked an intercession of a priest of the god Jinendra to help him recover a title deed to the Blaines' house which Mukhum Dass had lost. Dhulap Singh, Gungadhura's agent, was eager to get possession of the house for his master, she said, for the maharaja believed the Sialpore Treasure was hidden under it. And if Dhulap Singh found the title deed, it would establish the claim to the house he was about to present in a lawsuit.

"Chamu the butler will pay his son's gambling-debt. Give him a receipt, saying nothing. Your part is silence in all matters. Otherwise the priest of Jinendra will transfer the title deed to Dhulap Singh. Preserve the bank-note for thirty days and keep silence."

THUS spake the gods from their place above the firmament,
Turning from the feasting and the music and the mirth—
"There is time and tide to burn;
Let us stack the plates a turn
And study at our leisure what the trouble is with earth."

Down, down they looked through the azure of the Infinite
Scanning each the meadows where he went with men of yore,
Each his elbows on a cloud,
Making reckoning aloud—
Till the murmur of God-wonder was a titan thunder-roar.

"War rocks the world! Look, the arquebus and culverin
Vanish in contraptions that presage T. N. T!
Lo, the legions back and forth
Driving new machines of wrath!
Do they justify invention? Will they scrap the Laws that Be?

"Look! Mark ye well: where we left a people flourishing,
Singing in the sunshine for the fun of being free,
Now on merry man and maid
There's a priestly halter laid,
And the bourgeois blow their noses by a communal decree!

"Where, where away are the liberties we left to them—
Gift of being merry and the privilege of fun?
Is delight no longer praise?
Will they famish all their days
For a future built on fury in a present scarce begun?"

CHAPTER V

THE one thing in India that never happens is the expected. If the actual thing itself does occur, then the manner of it sets up so many unforeseen contingencies that only the subtlest mind, and the sanest and the least hide-bound by opinion, can hope to read the signs fast enough to understand them as they happen.

Naturally there are always plenty of people who can read backward after the event; and the few of those who keep the lesson to themselves, digesting rather than discussing it, are to be found eventually filling the senior secretaryships, albeit bitterly criticized by the other men, who unraveled everything afterward very cleverly and are always unanimous on just one point—that the fellow who said nothing certainly knew nothing, and is therefore of no account and should wield no influence. Q. E. D.

And as we belong to the majority, in that we are uncovering the course of these events very cleverly long after they took place, we must at this point to be logical denounce Theresa Blaine. She was just as much puzzled as anybody. But she said much less than anybody, wasted no time at all on guesswork, pondered in her heart persistently whatever she had actually seen and heard, and in the end was almost the only non-Indian actor on the stage of Sialpore to reap advantage.

If that does not prove unfitness for one of the leading parts, what does? A star should scintillate—should focus all eyes on herself and interrupt the progress of the play to let us know how wise and beautiful and wonderful she is. But Tess apparently agreed with *Hamlet* that "the play's the thing," and was much too interested in the plot to interfere with it.

She attended the usual round of dinners, teas and tennis parties, that are part of the

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system by which the English keep alive their fiction. And growing after a while a little tired of fiction, she tried to scandalize Sialpore by inviting Tom Tripe to her own garden party, successfully overruling Tripe's objections.

"Between you and I and the gate-post, lady, they don't hanker for my society. If somebody—specially colonels, or a judge maybe—wanted to borrow a horse from the maharaja's stable—or perhaps they'd like a file o' men to escort a picnic in the hills—then it's: 'Oh, hello, good morning, Mr. Tripe. How's the dog this morning? And oh, by the way—' Then I know what's coming, an' what I can do for 'em I do; for I confess, lady, that I hanker for a little bit o' flattery and a few words o' praise I'm not entitled to.

"I don't covet any man's money—or at least not enough to damn me into —— on that account. Finding's keeping, and a bet's a bet, but I don't covet money more than that dog o' mine covets fleas. He likes to scratch 'em when he has 'em. Me the same; I can use money with the next man, his or mine. But I wouldn't go to —— for money any more than Trotters would for fleas; although, mind you, I'm not saying Trotters hasn't got fleas. He has 'em, same as ——'s my destiny.

"But when it comes to praise that ain't due me, lady, I'm like Trotters with another dog's bone—I've simply got to have it, reason or no reason. A common ordinary bone with meat on it is just a meal. Praise I've earned is nothing wonderful. But praise I don't deserve is stolen fruit, and that's the sweetest.

"Now, if I was to come to your party I'd get no praise, ma'am. I'd be doing right by you, but they'd say I didn't know my place, and by and by they'd prove it to me, sharp and sneery. I'll be a coward to stop away, but 'Sensible man,' they'll say; 'knows when he isn't wanted.' You see, ma'am, yours is the only house in Sialpore where I can walk in and know I'm welcome whether you're at home or not."

"All the more reason for coming to the party, Tom."

"Ah-h-h! If only you understood!"

He wagged his head and one finger at her in his half-amused paternal manner that would often win for him when all else failed. But this time it did not work.

"I don't care for half-friends, Tom. If you expect to be welcome at my house you must come to my parties when I ask you."

"Lady, lady!"

"I mean it."

"Oh, very well. I'll come. I've protested. That absolves me. And my hide's thick. It takes more than just a snub or two—or three—to knock my number down. Am I to bring Trotters?"

"Certainly. Trotters is my friend too. I count on him to do his tricks and help entertain."

"They'll say of you, ma'am, afterwards that you don't know better than ask Tripe and his vulgar dog to meet nice people."

"They'll be right, Tom. I don't know better. I hope they'll say it to me, that's all."

But Tess discovered when the day came that no American can scandalize the English. They simply don't expect an American to know how to behave, and Tom Tripe and his marvelous performing dog were accepted and approved of as sincerely as the real American ice-cream soda—and forgotten as swiftly the morning following.

The commissioner was actually glad to meet Tripe in the circumstances. If the man should suppose that because Sir Roland Samson and a judge of appeal engaged in a three-cornered conversation with him at a garden party, therefore either of them would speak to the maharaja's drillmaster when next they should meet in public, he might guess again, that was all.

ONE of the things the commissioner asked Tripe was whether he was responsible for the mounting of palace guards—of course not improperly inquisitive about the maharaja's personal affairs, but anxious to seem interested in the fellow's daily round, since just then one couldn't avoid him.

"In a manner and after a fashion, yes, sir. I'm responsible that routine goes on regularly and that the men on duty know their business."

"Ah. Nothing like responsibility. Good for a man. Some try to avoid it, but it's good.

"So you look after the guard on all the palaces? The Princess Yasmini's too, eh? Well, well; I can imagine that might be nervous work. They say that young lady is ——. Eh, Tripe?"

"I couldn't say, sir. My duties don't take me inside the palace."

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"Now, now, Tripe! No use trying to look innocent! They tell me she's a handful and you encourage her!"

"Some folks don't care *what* they say, sir."

"If she should be in trouble, I dare say now, you'd be the man she'd apply to for help."

"I'd like to think that, sir."

"Might ask you to take a letter, for instance, to me or his honor the judge here?"

His honor the judge walked away. He did not care to be mixed up in intrigue, even hypothetically, and especially with a member of the lower orders.

"I'd do for her what I'd do for a daughter of my own, sir, neither more nor less."

"Quite so, Tripe. If she gave you a letter to bring to me, you'd bring it, eh?"

"Excepting barratry, the ten commandments, earthquake and the act of God, sir, yes."

"Without the maharaja knowing?"

"Without his Highness knowing."

"You'd do that with a clear conscience, eh?"

Tom Tripe screwed his face up, puffed his cheeks, and struck a very military attitude.

"A soldier's got no business with a conscience, sir. Conscience makes a man squeamish o' doing right for fear his wife's second cousin might tell the neighbors."

"Ha-ha! Very profoundly philosophic! I dare wager you've carried her letters at least a dozen times—now come."

Again Tom Tripe puffed out his cheeks and struck an attitude.

"Men don't get hanged for murder, sir."

"For what, then?"

"Talking before and afterwards!"

"Excellent! If only every one remembered that! Did it ever occur to you how the problem might be reversed?"

"Sir?"

"There might one day be a letter for the Princess Yasmini that, as her friend, you ought to make sure should reach her?"

"I'd take a letter from you to her, sir, if that's your meaning."

Sir Roland Samson, K. C. S. I., looked properly shocked. There are few things so appalling as the abruptness with which members of the lower orders divest diplomacy's kernel of its decorative outer shell.

"What I meant is—ah——"

He set his monocle and stared as if Tripe were an insect on a pin-point.

"Since you admit you're in the business of intriguing for the princess no doubt you carry letters to as well as from her and hold your tongue about that too?"

"If I should deliver letters they'd be secret or they'd have gone through the mail. I'd risk my job each time I did it. Would I risk it worse by talking? Once the maharaja heard a whisper——"

"Well—I'll be careful not to drop a hint to his Highness. As you say, it might imperil your job. And ah—" again the monocle "—the initials r. s.—in small letters, not capitals—in the bottom left-hand corner of a small white envelop would—ah—you understand—you'd see that she received it, eh?"

Tom Tripe bridled visibly. Neither the implied threat nor the proposal to make use of him without acknowledging the service afterward escaped him. Samson, who believed among other things in keeping all inferiors thoroughly in their place, decided on the instant to rub home the lesson while it smarted.

"You'd find it profitable. You'd be paid whatever the situation called for. You needn't doubt that."

Tess, talking with a group of guests some little distance off, observed a look of battle in Tom Tripe's eye, and smiled two seconds later as the commissioner let fall his monocle. Two things she was certain of at once: Tom Tripe would tell her at the first opportunity exactly what had happened, and Samson would lie about it glibly if provoked. She promised herself she would provoke him. As a matter of fact Tom gave her two or three versions afterward of what his words had been, their grandeur increasing as imagination flourished in the confortable warmth of confidence. But the first account came from a fresh memory:

"No money *you'll* ever touch would buy my dog's silence, let alone mine, sir! If you've a letter for the princess send it along and I'll see she gets it. If she cares to answer it I'll see the answer reaches you. As for dropping hints to the maharaja about my doing little services for the princess—a gentleman's a gentleman, and don't need instruction—nor advice from me. If I was out of a job tomorrow I'd still be a man on two feet, to be met as such."

A man of indiscretion, and a diplomat,

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must have fire-proof feelings. As Tess had observed, Samson blenched distinctly, but he recovered in a second and put in practise some of that opportunism that was his secret pride, reflecting how a less finished diplomatist would have betrayed resentment at the snub from an inferior instead of affecting not to notice it at all. As a student of human nature he decided that Tom Tripe's pride was the point to take advantage of.

"You're the very man I can trust," he said. "I'm glad we have had this talk. If ever you receive a small white envelop marked r. s. in the left-hand bottom corner, see that the princess gets it, and say nothing."

"Trust me, eh?" Tripe muttered as Samson walked away. "You never trusted your own mother without you had a secret hold over her. I wouldn't trust you that far!"

He spat among the flowers, for Tom could not pretend to real garden-party manners.

"And if she trusts you, letters or no letters, I'll eat my spurs and saber cold for breakfast."

THEN, as if to console himself with proof that some one in the world did trust him thoroughly, Tom swaggered with a riding-master stride to where Tess stood talking with a Rajput prince, who had come late and threatened to leave early. The prince had puzzled her by referring two or three times to his hurry, once even going so far as to say good-by, and then not going. It was as if he expected her to know something that she did not know, and to give him a cue that he waited for in vain.

She felt he must think her stupid, and the thought made her every minute less at ease; but Tom's approach, eyed narrowly by Samson for some reason, seemed to raise the Rajput's spirits.

"If only my husband were here!" she said aloud. "But at the last minute—There was blasting, you know and——"

The prince—he was quite a young one, twenty-one perhaps—murmured something polite and with eyes that smoldered watched Tom take a letter from his tunic pocket. He handed it to Tess with quite a flourish.

"Some one must have dropped this, ma'am."

The envelop was scented, and addressed in Persian characters. She saw the prince's eyes devour the thing—saw him exchange glances with Tom Tripe—and realized that Tom had rather deftly introduced her to another actor in the unseen drama that was going on. Clearly the next move was hers.

"Is it yours, perhaps?" she asked.

Prince Utirupa Singh bowed and took the letter. Samson, with a look of baffled fury behind the monocle, but a smile for appearance sake, joined them at that minute; and Utirupa seemed to take delight in so manipulating the sealed envelop that the commissioner could see only the back of it.

The prince was an extremely handsome young man, as striking in one way as Samson in another. Polo and pig-sticking had kept him lean; and association with British officers had given him an air of being frankly at his ease even when really very far from feeling it. He had the natural oriental gift of smothering excitement, added to a trick learned from the West of aggressive self-restraint that is not satisfied with seeming the opposite of what one is, but insists on extracting humor from the situation and on calling attention to the humor.

"I shall always be grateful to you," he said, smiling into Tess' eyes with his own wonderful brown ones, but talking at the commissioner. "If I had lost this letter I should have been at a loss indeed. If some one else had found it that might have been disastrous."

"But I did not find it for you," Tess objected.

Utirupa turned his back to the commissioner and answered in a low voice—

"Nevertheless, when I lose letters I shall come here first."

He bowed to take his leave and showed the back of the envelop again to Samson with a quiet malice worthy of Torquemada. The commissioner looked almost capable of snatching it.

"Mrs. Blaine," he said with a laugh after the prince had gone, "skill and experience, I am afraid, are not much good without luck. Luck seems to be a thing I lack. Now if I had picked up that letter I've a notion that the information in it would have saved me a year's work."

Tess was quite sure that Tom had not picked the letter up, but there was no need to betray her knowledge.

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"Do you mean you'd have opened a letter you picked up in my garden?" she demanded.

His eyes accepted her challenge.

"Why not?"

"But why? Surely——"

"Necessity, dear lady, knows no law. That's one of the first axioms of diplomacy. Consider your husband as a case in point. Custom, which is the basis of nearly all law, says he ought to be here entertaining your guests. Necessity, ignoring custom, obliges him to stay in the hills and supervise the blasting, disappointing every one but me. I'm going to take advantage of his necessity."

If he had seen the swift glance she gave him he might have changed the course of one small page of history. Tess knew nothing of the intrigue he was engaged in. She was not at all keen to know his secrets, and if he had glimpsed that swift betrayal of her feelings he would certainly not have volunteered further confidences.

But the poison of ambition blinds all those who drink it, so that the "safest" men unburden themselves to the wrong, unwilling ears.

"Walk with me up and down the path where every one can see us, won't you?" he asked.

"Why?" she laughed. "Do you flatter yourself I'd be afraid to be caught alone with you?"

"I hope you'd like to be alone with me! I would like nothing better. But if we walk up and down together on the path in full view, we arouse no suspicion and we can't be overheard. I propose to tell some secrets."

Not many women would resist the temptation of inside political information. Recognizing that by some means beyond her comprehension she was being drawn into a maze of secrets all interrelated and any of them likely to involve herself at any minute, Tess had no compunction whatever.

"I'll be frank with you," she said. "I'm curious."

Once they walked up the path and down again, talking of dogs, because it happened that Tom Tripe's enormous beast was sprawling in the shadow of a rose-bush at the farther end. The commissioner did not like dogs.

"Something loathsome about them—degrading—especially the big ones."

She disagreed. She liked them, cold, wet noses and all, even in the dark.

Tom Tripe, stepping behind a bush with the obvious purpose of smoking in secret the clay pipe that he hardly troubled to conceal, whistled the dog, who leaped into life as if stung and joined his master.

THE second time up and down Tess and the commissioner talked of professional beggars and what a problem they are to India, because they both happened as they turned to catch sight of Umra with the one eye, entering through the little gate in the wall and shuffling without modesty or a moment's hesitation to his favorite seat among the shrubs, whence to view proceedings undisturbed.

"Those three beggars that haunt this house seem to claim all our privileges," she said. "They wouldn't think of letting us give a garden party without them."

"Say the word," he said, "and I'll have them put in prison."

But she did not say the word.

The third time up the path he chose to waste on very obvious flattery.

"You're such an unusual woman, you know, Mrs. Blaine. You understand whatever's said to you, and don't ask idiotic questions. And then, of course, you're American, and I feel I can say things to you that my own countrywomen wouldn't understand. As an American, in other words, you're privileged."

As they turned at the top of the path she felt a cold, wet something thrust into her hand from behind. She had never in her life refused a caress to a dog that asked for one, and her fingers closed almost unconsciously on Trotters' muzzle, touching as they did so the square, unmistakable, hard edges of an envelop. There was no mistaking the intent; the dog forced it on her and the instant her fingers closed on it slunk out of sight.

"Wasn't that Tripe's infernal dog again?"

"Was it? I didn't see."

She was wiping slobber on to her skirt from an envelop whose strong perfume had excited the dog's salivary glands. But it was true that she did not see.

"May I call you Theresa?"

"Why?"

"It would encourage confidences. There isn't another woman in Sialpore whom I could tell what I'm going to say to you.

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The others would repeat it to their husbands, or——"

"I tell mine everything. Every word."

"Or they'd try and work me on the strength of it for little favors——"

"Wait until you know me. Little favors don't appeal to me. I like them big—big!"

"Honestly, Theresa——"

"Better call me Mrs. Blaine."

"Honestly, there's nothing under heaven that——"

"That you really know about me. I know there isn't. You were going to tell secrets. I'm listening."

"You're a hard-hearted woman!"

She had contrived by that time to extract a letter from the envelop behind her back, but how to read it without informing Samson was another matter. As she turned up the path for the sixth time the sight of Tom Tripe making semi-surreptitious signals to attract her attention convinced her that the message was urgent and that she should not wait to read it until after her last guests were gone. It was only one sheet of paper, written probably on only one side—she hoped in English. But how——

Suddenly she screamed, and Samson was all instant concern.

"Was that a snake? Tell me, was that a snake I saw? Oh, do look, please! I loathe them."

"Probably a lizard."

"No, no; I know a lizard. Do, please look!"

Unbelieving, he took a stick and poked about among the flowers to oblige her; so she read the message at her leisure behind the broad of his back, and had folded it out of sight before he looked up.

"No, no snakes. Nothing but a lizard."

"Oh, I'm so glad! Please forgive me, but I dread snakes. Now tell me the secrets while I listen properly."

He noticed a change in her voice—symptom of new interest—and passed it to the credit of himself.

"There's an intrigue going on, and you can help me. Sp—people whose business it is to keep me informed have reported that Tom Tripe is constantly carrying letters from the Princess Yasmini of Sialpore to that young Prince Utirupa who was here this afternoon. Now it's no secret that if Gungadhura Singh were to get found out committing treason—and I'm pretty sure he's guilty of it five days out of six!—we'd depose him——"

"You mean the British would depose him?"

"Depose him root and branch. Then Utirupa would be next in line. He's a decent fellow. He'd be sure of the nomination, and he'd make a good ruler."

"Well?"

"I want to know what the Princess Yasmini has to do with it."

"It seems to me you're not telling secrets, but asking favors for nothing."

"Not for nothing—not for nothing! There's positively nothing that I won't do!"

"In return for——"

"Sure information as to what is going on."

"Which you think I can get for you?"

"I'm positive. You're such an extraordinary woman. I'm pretty sure it all hinges on the treasure I told you about the other day. Whoever gets first hold of that holds all the trumps. I'd like to get it myself. That would be the making of me, politically speaking.

"If Gungadhura should get it he'd ruin himself with intrigue in less than a year, but he might cause my ruin in the process. If the local priests should get it—and that's likeliest, all things considered—there'd be red ruin for miles around; money and the church don't mix without blood-letting, and you can't unscramble that omelet forever afterwards.

"I confess I don't know how to checkmate the priests. Gungadhura I think I can manage, especially with your aid. But I must have information."

"Is there any one else who'd be dangerous if he possessed the secret?"

"Anybody would be, except myself. Anybody else would begin playing for political control with it, and there'd be no more peace on this side of India for years.

"And now, this is what I want to say: The most dangerous individual who could possibly get that treasure would be the Princess Yasmini. The difficulty of dealing with her is that she's not above hiding behind *purdah* (the veil), where no male man can reach her.

"There are several women here whom I might interest in keeping an eye on her—Tatum's wife, and Miss Bent, and Miss

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O'Hara, and the Goole sisters—lots of 'em. But they'd all talk. And they'd all try to get influence for their male connections on the strength of being in the know. But somehow, Theresa, you're different."

"Mrs. Blaine, please."

"I know Tom Tripe thinks the world of you. I want you to find out for me from him everything he knows about this treasure intrigue and whatever's behind it."

"You think he'd tell me?"

"Yes. And I want you to make the acquaintance of the Princess Yasmini, and find out from her if you can what the letters are that she writes to Utirupa. You'll find the acquaintance interesting."

Tess crumpled a folded letter in her left hand.

"If you could give me an introduction to the princess—they say she's difficult to see—some sort of letter that would get me past the maharaja's guards—" she answered.

"I can. I will. The girl's a minor. I've the right to appoint some one to visit her and make all proper inquiries. I appoint you."

"Give me a letter now and I'll go tonight."

He stopped as they turned at the end of the path, and wrote on a leaf of his pocketbook. Behind his back Tess waved her secret letter to attract Tom Tripe's notice, and nodded.

"There," said Samson. "That's preliminary. I'll confirm it later by letter on official paper. But nobody will dare question that. If any one does, let me know immediately."

"Thank you."

"And now Theresa——"

"You forget."

"I forget nothing. I never forget. You'll be wondering what you are to get out of all this——"

"I wonder if you're capable of believing that nothing was farther from my thoughts."

"Don't think I want all for nothing. Don't imagine my happiness—my success—could be complete without——"

"Without a whisky and soda. Come and have one. I see my husband coming at last."

"——!" muttered Samson under his breath.

THERESA had expected her husband by the big gate, but he came through the little one, and she caught sight of him at once because through the corner of her eye she was watching some one else—Umra the beggar. Umra departed through the little gate thirty seconds before her husband entered it.

Blaine was so jubilant over a sample of crushed quartz he had brought home with him that there was no concealing his high spirits. He was cordial even to Samson, whom he detested, and so full of the milk of human kindness toward everybody else that they all wanted to stay and be amused by him. But Tess got rid of them at last by begging Samson to go first ostentatiously and set them an example, which he did after extracting a promise from her to see him *tête à tête* again at the earliest opportunity.

Then Tess showed her husband the letter that Tom's dog had thrust into her hand.

"You dine alone tonight, Dick, unless you prefer the club. I'm going at once. Read this."

It was written in a fine Italic hand on expensive paper, with corrections here and there as if the writer had obeyed inspiration first and consulted a dictionary afterward; a neat letter, even neat in its mistakes.

MOST PRECIOUS FRIEND:

Please visit me. It is necessary that you find some way of avoi—elu—tricking the guards, because there are orders not to admit any one and not to let me out.

Please bring with you food from your house, because I am hungry. A cat and two birds and a monkey have died from the food cooked for me. I am also thirsty. My mother taught me to drink wine, but the wine is finished, and I like water the best.

Tom Tripe will try to help you past the guards, but he has no brains, so you must give him orders. He is very faithful.

Please come soon, and bring a very large quantity of water. Yours with love, YASMINI.

"Most precious friend. . . please visit me!"

He read the letter and passed it back.

"D'you think it's on the level, Tess?"

"I know it is. Imagine that poor child, Dick, cooped up in a palace, starving and parching herself for fear of poison!"

"But how are you going to get to her? You can't put Gungadhura's guards out with a sunshade."

"Samson wrote this for me."

Dick Blaine scowled.

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"I allow Samson's favors are paid for sooner or later."

"So are mine, Dick. The beast has called me Theresa three times this afternoon, and has had the impudence to suggest that his preferment and my future happiness may bear some relation to each other."

"See here, Tess, maybe I'd better beat him and have done with it."

"No. He can't corrupt me, but he might easily do you an injury. Let him alone, Dick, and be as civil as you can. You did splendidly this evening——"

"Before I knew what he'd said to you!"

"Now you've all the more reason to be civil. I must keep in touch with that young girl in the palace, and Samson is the only influence I can count on. Do as I say, Dick, and be civil to him. Pretend you're not even suspicious."

"But say, that guy's suggestions aggregate an ounce or two! First, I'm to draw Gungadhura's money while I hunt for buried treasure; but I'm to tip off Samson first. Second, I'm to look on while he makes his political fortune with my wife's help. And third—what's the third thing, Tess?"

She kissed him.

"The third is that you're going to seem to be fooled by him, for the present at all events. Let's know what's at the bottom of all this, and help the princess and Tom Tripe if it's possible. Are you tired?"

"Yes. Why?"

"If you weren't tired I was going to ask you to put a turban on as soon as it's dark and dress up like a *sais* and drive me to Yasmini's palace with a revolver in each pocket in case of accidents and eyes and ears skinned until I come out again."

"Oh, I'm not too tired for that."

"Come along then. I'll put up a hamper with my own hands. You get wine from the cellar, and make sure the corks have not been pulled and replaced. Then get the dog-cart to the door. I'll keep it waiting there while you run up-stairs and change.

"Hurry, Dick, hurry—it's growing dark. I'll put some sandwiches under the seat for you to eat while you're waiting in the dark for me."

LOUD laughed the gods (and their irony was pestilence;
Pain was in their mockery, affliction in their scorn.
The *ryotwari* cried
On a stricken countryside,
For the scab fell on the sheepfold and the mildew on the corn.)

"Write, Chitragupta!* Enter up your reckoning!
Yum * awaits in anger the assessment of the dead!
We left a law of kindness,
But they bowed themselves in blindness
To a cruelty consummate and a mystery instead!

"Write, Chitragupta! Once we sang and danced with them.
Now in gloomy temples they lay foreheads in the dust!
Once we came and went
Amid their play in town and tent,
Till they set their priests between us and we left them in disgust.

"Fun and mirth we made for them (write it, Chitragupta!
Set it down in symbols for the awful eye of Yum!)
But they traded fun for fashion
And jollity for passion,
Till they murmur in their wallow now the consequences come.

"Look! Look and wonder how the simple folk are out of it!
Empirics are the teachers and the liars leading men!
We were generous and free—
Aye, a social lot were we;
But they took to priests instead of us, and trouble started then!"

CHAPTER VI

"Peace, maharaja sahib! Out of anger came no wise counsel yet!"

TOM TRIPE had done exactly what Yasmini ordered him. Like his dog Trotters, whom he had schooled to perfection, and who behaved as he would have liked to have the maharaja's guards behave, he always fell back on sheer obedience whenever facts bewildered him or circumstances seemed too strong.

Yasmini had ordered him to report to the maharaja a chance encounter with an individual named Gunga Singh. Accordingly he did. Asked who Gunga Singh was, he replied he did not know. She had told him to say that Gunga Singh said the Princess Yasmini was at the commissioner's house; so he told the maharaja that and nothing further.

Gungadhura sent two men immediately to make inquiries. One drew the commissioner's house blank, bribing a servant to let him search the place in Samson's absence; the other met the commissioner himself and demanded of him pointblank what he had been doing with the princess.

The question was so bluntly put and the

* In Hindu mythology Yum is the judge of the dead and Chitragupta writes the record for him.

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man's attitude so impudent that Samson lost his temper and couched his denial in blunt, bellicose, bad language. The vehemence convinced the questioner that he was lying, as the maharaja was shortly informed. So the fact became established beyond the possibility of refutation that Yasmini had been closeted with Samson for several hours that morning.

Remained, of course, to consider why she had gone to him and what might result from her visit; and up to a certain point, and in certain cases, accurate guessing is easier than might be expected for either side to a political conundrum in India, ample provision having been made for it by all concerned.

The English are fond of assuring strangers and one another that spying is "un-English;" that it "isn't done, you know, old top;" and the surest way of heaping public scorn and indignation on the enemies of England is to convict them, correctly or otherwise, of spying on England secretly. So it would be manifestly libelous, ungentlemanly, and proof conclusive of crass ignorance to assert that Samson in his capacity of commissioner employed spies to watch Gungadhura Singh. He had no public fund from which to pay spies. If you don't believe that, then ponder over a copy of the Indian Estimates. Every rupee is accounted for.

The members of the maharaja's household who came to see Samson at more or less frequent intervals were members of the native community whom he encouraged to intimacy for ethnological and social reasons. When they gave him information about Gungadhura's doings, that was merely because they were incurably addicted to gossip; as a gentleman, and in some sense a representative of his Majesty the King, he would not dream, of course, of paying attention to any such stuff; but one could not, of course, be so rude and high-handed as to stop their talking even if it did tend toward an accurate foreknowledge of the maharaja's doings that was hardly "cricket."

As for money, certainly none changed hands. The indisputable fact that certain friends and relatives of certain members of the maharaja's household enjoyed rather profitable contracts on British-administered territory was coincidence. Everybody knows how long is the arm of coincidence. Well, then, so are its ears, and its tongue.

As for the maharaja, the rascal went the length of paying spies in British Government offices. There was never any knowing who was a spy of his and who wasn't. People were everlastingly crossing the river from the native State to seek employment in some Government department or other, and one could not investigate them really thoroughly. It was so easy to forge testimonials and references and what not.

One of Samson's grooms had once been caught red-handed eavesdropping in the dark. Samson, of course, took the law into his own hands on that occasion and thrashed the blackguard within an inch of his treacherous life; and in proof that the thrashing was richly deserved some one reported to Samson the very next day how the groom had gone straight to the maharaja and had been solaced with silver money.

It was even said, although never proved, that the fat, short-sighted young babu Sita Ram who typed the commissioner's official correspondence was one of Gungadhura's spies. There was a mystery about where he spent his evenings.

But his mother's uncle was a first-class magistrate, so one could not very well dismiss him without clear proof. Besides, he was uncommonly painstaking and efficient.

One way and another it is easy to see that Gungadhura had a deal of dovetailed information from which to draw conclusions as to the probable reason of Yasmini's alleged visit to the commissioner. One false conclusion invariably leads to another, and so Samson got the blame for the secret bargain with the Rangar stable-owner, with whose connivance Yasmini had contrived to keep a carriage available outside her palace gates.

Her palace gates having closed on the carriage now, the guards would pay attention that it stayed inside, but there was no knowing how many riding-horses she might have at her beck and call in various khans and places. Doubtless Samson had arranged for that. Gungadhura sent men immediately to search Sialpore for horses that might be held in waiting for her, with orders to hire or buy the animals over her head, or in the alternative to lame them.

As for her motive in visiting the commissioner that was not far to seek. There was only one motive in Sialpore for anything—the Treasure. No doubt Samson lusted for it as sinfully and lustily and craftily as any one.

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If, thought Gungadhura, Yasmini had a clue to its whereabouts, as she might have, then whoever believed she was not trafficking with the commissioner must be a simpleton. The commissioner was known to have written more than one very secret report to Simla on the subject of the Treasure, and on the political consequences that might follow on its discovery by natives of the country. The reports had been so secret and important that Gungadhura had thought it worth while to have the blotting-paper from Samson's desk photographed in Paris by a special process.

Adding two and two together now by the ancient elastic process, Gungadhura soon reached the stage of absolute conviction that Yasmini was in league with Samson to forestall him in getting control of the treasure of his ancestors and Gungadhura was a dark, hot-blooded, volcanic-tempered man, who stayed not on the order of his anger but blew up at once habitually.

We have seen how he came careering down-street just in time to see Yasmini's carriage rumble into her stone-paved palace courtyard. After ordering the guards not to let her escape again on pain of unnamed, but no less likely because illegal, punishment, he rode full pelt to the temple of Jinendra, whence they assured him Yasmini had just come, and his spurs rung presently on the temple floor like the footfalls of avenging deity.

JINENDRA'S priest welcomed him with that mixture of deference and patronage that priests have always known so well how to extend to royalty, showing him respect because priestly recognition of his royalty entitled him in logic to the outward form of it—patronage because, as the "wisest fool in Christendom" remarked, "No bishop, no king!"

The combination of sarcastic respect and contemptuous politeness produced an insolence that none except kings would tolerate for a moment; but Jinendra's fat High Priest could guess how far he dared go, as shrewdly as a marksman guesses windage.

"She has betrayed us! That foreign she—— has betrayed us!" shouted Gungadhura, slamming the priest's private door behind him and ramming home the bolt as if it fitted into the breech of a rifle.

"Peace! Peace, maharaja *sahib!* Out of anger came no wise counsel yet!"

"She has been to the commissioner's house!"

"I know it."

"You know it? Then she told you?"

The priest was about to lie, but Gungadhura saved him.

"I know she was here," he burst out. "My men followed her home."

"Yes, she was here. She told."

"How did you make her tell? The she—— is more cunning than a cobra!"

Jinendra's High Priest smiled complacently.

"A servant of the gods, such as I am, is not altogether without power. I found a way. She told."

"I, too, will find a way!" muttered Gungadhura to himself.

Then to the priest:

"What did she say? Why did she go to the commissioner?"

"To ask a favor."

"Of course! What favor?"

"That she may go to Europe."

"Then there is no longer any doubt whatever! By the grace of Saraswati (the goddess of wisdom) I know that she has discovered where the Treasure is!"

"My son," said the priest, "it is not manners to call on other gods by name in this place."

"By Jinendra, then! Thou fat sedentary appetite, what a great god thine must be, that he can choose no cleverer servant than thee to muddle his affairs! While thou wast lulling me to sleep with dreams about a clue to be found in a cellar, she has already sucked the secret out from some asp's hole and has sold it to the commissioner! As soon as he has paid her a proportion of it she will escape to Europe to avoid me—will she!"

"But the commissioner refused the desired permission," said the priest, puffing his lips and stroking his stomach, as much as to add:

"It's no use getting impatient in Jinendra's temple. We have all the inside information here."

"What do you make of that?" demanded Gungadhura.

The priest smiled. One does not explain everything to a mere maharaja. But the mere maharaja was in no mood to be put off with smiles just then.

As Yasmini got the story afterward from the bald old mendicant, whose piety had

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recently won him permission to bask on the comfortable carved stones just outside the window, Gungadhura burst forth into such explosive profanity that the High Priest ran out of the room. The mendicant vowed that he heard the door slam—and so he did; but it was really Gungadhura, done with argument, on his way to put threat into action.

The mildest epithet he called Yasmini was "*Widyadhara*," which meant in his interpretation of the word that she was an evil spirit condemned to roam the earth because her sins were so awful that the other evil spirits simply could not tolerate her.

"It is plain that the commissioner fears to let her go to Europe," swore Gungadhura. "Therefore it is plain that she and he have a plan between them to loot the Treasure and say nothing. Neither trusts the other, as is the way of such people. He will not let her out of sight until he can leave India himself."

"He has promised to send European *memsahibs* to call on her," said the priest; and the maharaja gnashed his teeth and swore like a man stung by a hornet.

"That is to prevent me from using violence on her. He will have frequent reports as to her health. After a time, when he has his fingers in the Treasure, he will not be so anxious about her welfare."

"There was another matter that she told me," said the priest.

"Repeat it then, Belly-of-Jinendra! Thy paunch retains a tale too long."

"Tripe, the drillmaster, is a welcome guest at the house built by Jengal Singh."

"What of it?"

"He may enter even when the *sahibs* are away from home. The servants have orders to admit him."

"Well?"

The priest smiled again.

"If it should chance to be true that the princess knows the secret of the Treasure, and that she is selling it to the commissioner, Tripe could enter that house and discover the clue. Who could rob you of the Treasure once you knew the secret of its hiding-place?"

It was at that point that the maharaja grew so exasperated at the thought of another's knowledge of a secret that he considered rightly his own by heritage, that his language exceeded not only the bounds of decorum but the limits of commonplace blasphemy as well. Turning his back on the priest, he rushed from the room, slamming the door behind him. And, being a ruminant fat mortal, the priest sat so still considering on which side of the equation his own bread might be buttered as to cause the impression that the room was empty; whereas only the maharaja had left it. And a little later the babu Sita Rem came in.

Gungadhura was in no mood to be trifled with. He knew pretty well where to find Tom Tripe during any of the hours of duty, so he cornered him without delay and, glaring at him with eyes like an animal's at bay, ordered him to search the Blaines' house at the first opportunity.

"Search for what?" demanded Tripe.

"For anything! For everything! Search the cellar; search the garden; search the roof! Are you a fool? Are you fit for my employment? Then search the house, and report to me anything unusual that you find in it! Go!"

AFTER several stiff brandies and sodas Gungadhura then conceived a plan that might have been dangerous even supposing Yasmini to have been less alert, and supposing that she really knew the secret. He spent an evening coaching Patali, his favorite dancing-girl, and then sent her to Yasmini with almost full powers to drive a bargain.

She might offer as much as half of the Treasure to Yasmini, provided Gungadhura should receive the other half and the British should know nothing. That was the one point on which Patali's orders permitted no discretion. The whole transaction must be secret from the British.

Reporting the encounter afterward to her employer, Patali hardly seemed proud of her share in it. All the information she brought back was to the effect that Yasmini denied all knowledge of the Treasure, and all desire to possess it.

"I think she knows nothing. She said very little to me. She laughed at the idea of bargaining with Englishmen. She said you are welcome to the Treasure, maharaja *sahib*, and that if she should ever find its hiding-place she will certainly tell you. She plays the part of a woman whose spirit is already broken and who is weary of India."

Having a very extensive knowledge of dancing-girls and their ways, Gungadhura

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did not believe much more than two per cent. of Patali's account of what had taken place; and he was right, except that he grossly overestimated her truthfulness. And even with his experienced cynicism it never entered his head to suppose that Patali was the individual who warned Yasmini in advance of the preparations being made to poison her by Gungadhura's orders.

Yet, as it was Patali's own sister who made the sweetmeats, and tampered with the charcoal for the filter, and put the powdered diamonds in the chutney, it was likely enough that Patali would know the facts; and for motives, dancing-girls don't have them. They fear, they love, they desire, they seek to please. If Yasmini could pluck heart-strings more cleverly than Gungadhura could break and bruise them, so much the worse for Gungadhura's plans, that was all, as far as Patali was concerned.

For several days after that, as Yasmini more than hinted in her letter to Tess, repeated efforts were made to administer poison in the careful, undiscoverable ways that India has made her own since time immemorial. But you can not easily poison any one who does not eat, and who drinks wine that was bottled in Europe; or at any rate, to do it you must call in experts who are expensive in the first place as well as adepts at blackmail in the second.

Yasmini enjoyed a charmed life and an increasing appetite, Gungadhura's guards attending to it, however, that she took no more forbidden walks and rides and swims by moonlight to make the hunger really unendurable. Supplies were allowed to pass through the palace gate after they had been tampered with.

Finally Gungadhura, biting his nails and drinking whisky in the intervals between consultations with a dozen different sets of priests, made up his mind to drastic action. It dawned on his exasperated mind that every single priest, including Jinendra's obese incumbent, was trying to take advantage of his predicament in order to feather a priestly nest or forward plans diametrically opposed to his own.

(Not that recognition of priestly deception made him less superstitious, or any less dependent on the priests; if that were the way discovery worked, all priests would have vanished long ago. It simply made him furious, like a tiger in a net, and spurred him to wreak damage in which the priests might have no hand.)

Whisky, drugs, reflection and the hints of twenty dancing-girls convinced him that Jinendra's priest especially was playing a double game; for what was there in the fat man's mental ingredients that should anchor his loyalty to an ill-tempered prince, in case a princess of wit and youth and brilliant beauty should stake her cunning in the game?

Why was not Yasmini already ten times dead of poison? Nothing but the cunning inspired by partnership with priests, and alertness born of secret knowledge, could have given her the intelligence to order her maids to boil a present of twenty pairs of French silk stockings—nor the malice to hang them afterward with her own hands on a line across her palace roof in full view of Gungadhura's window!

Hatred of Yasmini was an obsession of his in any case. He had loathed her mother, who dared try to wear down the rule that women must be veiled. Even his own dancing-girls were heavily veiled in public, and all his relations with women of any sort took place behind impenetrable screens. He was a stickler for that sort of thing, and, like others of his kidney, rather proud of the rumors that no curtains could confine.

So he loathed and despised Yasmini even more than he had detested her mother, because she coupled to her mother's Western notions about freedom a wholly Eastern ability to take advantage of restraint. In other words she was too clever for him.

On top of all that, she had dared outrage his royal feelings by refusing to be given in marriage to the husband he selected for her—a fine, black-bristling, stout cavalier of sixty with a wife or two already and impoverished estates that would have swallowed Yasmini's fortune nicely at a gulp. Incidentally, the husband would have eagerly canceled a gambling debt in exchange for a young wife with an income.

There was no point at which Yasmini and himself could meet on less than rapier terms. Her exploits in disguise were notorious—so notorious that men sang songs about them in the drinking-places and the khans.

And as if that were not bad enough, there was a rumor lately that she had turned *Abhisharika*. The word is Sanskrit and poetic. To the ordinary folk, who like to listen to love-stories by moonlight on the

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roofs or under trees, that meant that she had chosen her own lover and would go to him, when the time should come, of her own free will. To Gungadhura naturally such a word bore other meanings. As we have said, he was a stickler for propriety.

Last, and most uncomfortable crime of all, it seemed that she had now arranged with Samson to have English ladies call on her at intervals. Not a prophet on earth could guess where that might lead to, and to what extremes of Western fashion; for though one does not see the high-caste women of Rajputana they themselves see everything and know all that is going on. But it needed no prophet to explain that a woman visited at intervals by the wives of English officers could not be murdered easily or safely.

ALL arguments pointed one way. He must have it out with Yasmini in one battle. If she should be willing to surrender, good. He would make her pay for the past, but no doubt there were certain concessions that he could yield without loss of dignity.

If she knew the secret of the hiding-place of the Treasure he would worm it out of her. There are ways, he reflected, of worming secrets from a woman.

If she knew the secret and refused to tell, then he knew how to provide that she should never tell any one else. If she had told some one else already—Samson, for instance, or Jinendra's priest—then he would see to it that priest or commissioner, as the case might be, must carry on without the cleverest member of the firm.

But he must hurry. Poison apparently would not work, and he did not dare murder her outright, much as he would have liked to. It was maddening to think how one not very violent blow with a club or a knife would put an end to her wilfulness forever, and yet that the risk to himself in that case would be almost as deadly as the certainty for her.

But accidents might happen. In a land of elephants, tigers, snakes, wild boars and desperate men there is a wide range for circumstance. And the sooner the accident, the less the risk of interference by some inquisitive Englishwoman with a ticket-of-admission signed by Samson.

An "accident" in Yasmini's palace, he decided, would be nearly as risky as murder. But he had a country place fifty miles away in the mountains, to which she could be forcibly removed, thus throwing inquisitive Englishwomen off the scent for a while at any rate.

That secluded little hunting-box stood by a purple lake that had already drowned its dozens, not always without setting up suspicion; and between the city of Sialpore and the "Nesting-Place of Seven Swans" lay leagues of wild road on which anything at all might happen and be afterward explained away.

As for the forcible abduction, that could best be got around by obliging her to write a letter to himself requesting permission to visit the mountains for a change of air and scenery. There were ways and means of obliging women to write letters. But he must hurry. No time like tonight.

Best of all, of course, would be Yasmini's unconditional surrender, because then he would be able to make use of her wits and her information instead of having to explain away her "accident" and cope alone with any one whom she might already have entrusted with her secret. There should be a strenuous effort first to bring her to her senses.

Physical pain, he had noticed, had more effect on people's senses than any amount of argument. There had been a very amusing instance recently. One of his dancing-girls named Malati had refused recently to sing and dance her best before a man to whom Gungadhura had designed to make a present of her; but the mere preliminaries of removing a toe-nail behind the scenes had changed her mind within three minutes.

Then there were other little humorous contrivances. There is a way of tying an intended convert to your views in such ingenious fashion that the lightest touch of a finger on taut catgut stretched from limb to limb causes exquisite agony. And a cigaret end, of course, applied in such circumstances to the tenderer parts has great power to persuade.

As to accomplices, those must be few and carefully chosen. Alone against Yasmini he knew he would have no chance whatever, for she was physically stronger than a panther, and as swift and graceful.

But there are creatures, not nearly yet extinct from Eastern courts, known as eunuchs, whose strongest quality is seldom

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said to be mercy, and whose chief business in life is to be amenable to orders and to guard with their lives their master's secrets. Three were really too many to be let into such a secret; but it had needed two to hold Malati properly while the third experimented on the toe-nail; so he must chance it and take three.

The only remaining problem did not trouble him much. The palace guards were his own men, and were therefore not likely to question his right to ignore the first law of *purdah* that forbids the crossing of a woman's threshold, especially after dark, unless she is your property. Besides, they all knew already what sort of prowl-by-night their master was, and laws were made for other people, not for maharajas.

BLEEDING enlisted man—that's me;
A peg in the officers' plan—maybe.
Drunk on occasion,
Disgrace to a nation
And proper societee.
Yet I've a notion the sky—pure blue—
Ain't more essential than I—clear through.
I'm a man. I can think.
In the chain of eternal
Affairs I'm a link,
And the chain ain't no stronger than me—or you.

CHAPTER VII

"That will be the end of Gungadhura!"

IT TOOK longer to get the hamper ready than Tess expected, partly because it did not seem expedient to have the butler Chamu in the secret. By the time she and her husband were up side by side in the dog-cart there was already a nearly full moon silvering the sky, and the jackals were yelping miserably on the hillside.

Before they reached the stifling town a slow breeze had moved the river-mist, until a curtain shut off the whole of the bazaar and merchants' quarters from the better residential section where the palaces stood. It was an ideal night for adventure; an almost perfect night for crime; one could step from street to street and leave no clue, because of the drifting vapor.

Here and there a solitary policeman coughed after they had passed, or slunk into a shadow lest they recognize and report him for sleeping at his post. All *sahibs* have unreasonable habits, and not even a constable can guess which one will not make trouble for him.

An occasional stray dog yapped at the wheels, and more than once heads peered over roof-tops to try to glimpse them, because gossip—especially about *sahibs* who are out after dark—is a coinage of its own that buys welcome and refreshment almost anywhere. But nothing in particular happened until the horse struck sparks from the granite flagstones outside Yasmini's gate, and a sleepy Rajput sentry brought his rifle to the challenge.

Then it was not exactly obvious what to do next. Tess felt perfectly confident on the high seat, with the pistol in her husband's pocket pressing against her and his reassuring bulk between her and the sentry; but everywhere else was insecurity and doubt. One does not as a rule descend from dog-carts after dark and present half-sheets of paper by way of passports for admission to Rajput palaces.

The sentry looked mildly interested, no more. He had been so thoroughly warned and threatened in case of efforts to escape from within, that it did not enter his head that any one might want to enter. However, since the dog-cart continued to stand still in front of the gate, he turned the guard out as a matter of routine; one never knew when *sahibs* would not complain about discourtesy.

The guard lined up at attention—eight men and a non-commissioned officer—double the regular number by Gungadhura's orders. The non-commissioned officer stepped up close to the dog-cart and spoke to the man he imagined was the *sais*, using, as was natural, the Rajput tongue. But Dick Blaine knew only enough of the language for fetch-and-carry purposes—not enough to deceive a native as to his nationality after the first two words.

"Now I feel foolish!" said Tess, and the corporal of the guard thrust his bearded face closer, supposing she spoke to him. Dick answered her:

"Shall I drive you home again, little woman? Say the word and we're off!"

"Not yet. I haven't tried my ammunition."

She pulled out Samson's scribbled permit and was about to offer it to the guard. But there was a risk that whatever she did would only arouse and increase his suspicions, and she offered it nervously.

"What if he won't give it back to you?" asked her husband.

"Oh, Dick, you're a regular prophet of evil tonight!"

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However, she withdrew the paper before the guard's fingers closed on it. The next moment a figure like a fantom, making no noise, almost made her scream. Dick produced a repeating pistol with that sudden swiftness that proves old acquaintance with the things, and the corporal of the guard sprang back with a shout of warning to his men, imagining the pistol was intended for himself. Tess recovered presence of mind first.

"It's all right, Dick. Put the gun out of sight."

She stretched out her hand and a cold nose touched her finger-ends, sniffing them. A dog's forefeet were on the shaft, and his eyes gleamed in the carriage lamplight.

"Good Trotters! Good boy, Trotters!"

She remembered Tom Tripe's lecture about calling dogs by name, wondering whether the rule applied to owners only, or whether she, too, could make the creature "do his own thinking." Before she could decide what she would like the dog to think about he was gone again as silently as he had come.

The guard was thoroughly on the *qui vive* by that time, if not suspicious, then officious. How should one protect the privacy of a palace gate if unknown *mem-sahibs* in dog-carts, with *saises* who knew English but did not answer when spoken to in the native tongue, were to be allowed to draw up in front of the gate at unseemly hours and remain there indefinitely? He ordered Tess away without further ceremony, making his meaning plain by taking the horse's head and starting him.

DICK BLAINE drew the horse back on his haunches and cursed the man for that piece of impudence, in language and with mannerisms that banished forever any delusions as to his nationality; and it occurred to the non-commissioned officer that his extra complement of men, standing in a row like dummies at attention, were not there after all for nothing. He dispatched two of them at a run to Gungadhura's palace, the one to tell the story of what had happened and the other to add to it whatever the first might omit. Between them they were likely to produce results of some sort.

"Now we're done for!" sighed Tess. "No chance tonight, I'm afraid. If only I'd done what she told me to and consulted with Tom Tripe first! Better drive home now, Dick, before we make the case worse.

The unreasonableness of the attempt convinced and discouraged her. It was like a nightmare. But as Dick reined the horse about there came out of the mist the sound of another horse at a walk, and two men marching in step. Then a man's voice broke the stillness.

Dick reined in, and a second later Trotters' huge paws rested on the shaft again. She could see his long unenthusiastic tail wagging to and fro.

"Tom!" she called. "Tom Tripe!"

"Coming, lady!"

Three figures emerged out of the gloom, one of them mounted and loquacious.

"I'd like to know what these rascally guards are doing off their post! Give these sons of camp-followers an inch and they'll take three leagues, every mother's son of them! Halt, there, you! Now then, where's your officer? Give an account of yourselves!"

There followed an interlude in Rajasthani,* Tom Tripe becoming more blasphemously vehement as it grew clearer that the corporal had done entirely right.

"Lady," he said presently, riding round to Tess' side of the dog-cart, "I'm going to have hard work to convince this man. I'd orders from Gungadhura to search your house, Krishna knows what for, and I rode up to ask your leave to do it, hoping you'd be alone after the party.

"Chamu told me you and your husband had gone out, and one of the three beggars gave me a message intended for you that tallied pretty close with one I knew you'd received already, so I guessed where to head for, and sent the dog in advance. He came back with his hair on end reporting trouble, and then as luck would have it I rode into these two men on their way to Gungadhura. If they'd reached him we'd all have had to make new plans tomorrow morning!"

"You want to see the princess, of course? But what have you got that can get you by the guard?"

Tess produced Samson's scribbled note and he studied it in the carriage lamplight. Then she recalled Yasmini's warning that Tom Tripe had no brains and must be told what to do. Her own wits began to work desperately.

* The native language of Rajputana.

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"I'm the lady doctor, Tom. That is my written order from the *burra sahib*" (commissioner).

Tom scratched his head and swore in a low voice fervently.

"The difficulty's this, lady: since the escape from the palace across the river the maharaja has taken the posting of palace guards out of my hands entirely. I've still the duty to inspect and make sure they're on the job— Oh, I see! I have it!"

He turned on the corporal with all the savagery that the white man generates in contact with Eastern subordinates.

"What do you mean," he demanded in the man's own language, "by standing in the way of the maharaja *sahib's* orders? Here's his Highness sending a lady doctor to the princess for an excuse to confine her elsewhere and have all this trouble off our hands, and you, like a blockhead, stand in the way to prevent it! See—there's the letter!"

The Rajput looked perplexed. All the world knows what privileges the rare American women doctors enjoy in that land of sealed seraglios.

"But it is written in English," he objected. "The maharaja *sahib* does not write English."

"Idiot! Of what use would a letter in Persian be to an American lady doctor?"

"But to me? It is I who command the guard and must read the letter. How can I read the letter?"

"I'll read it to you. What's more, I'll explain it. The princess has been appealing to the commissioner *sahib*——"

The Rajput nodded. It was all over town that Yasmini had been closeted with the commissioner on the morning of her recent escape. She herself had deliberately sown the seeds of that untruth.

"—So the commissioner *sahib* and the maharaja *sahib* had a conference——"

The Rajput nodded again. It was common knowledge, too, that the commissioner and Gungadhura had had a rather stormy interview the day before; and it was none of the corporal's privilege to know that all they had argued about was the ill-treatment of prisoners in the Sialpore jail.

"—It was agreed at the conference that if the princess can be proved mad, then the maharaja *sahib* may do as he's minded about sending her away into the hills. If she's not mad, then he's to give her her liberty. Do you understand, you dunderhead?"

"Hah! I understand. But why at night? Why not the maharaja *sahib's* signature in his own writing?"

"Son of incomprehension! Does the maharaja *sahib* wish still more scandal than already has been, by permitting such a visit in the daytime? Strike me everlasting dumb if he hasn't had more than enough already! Does he want the responsibility? Does he wish the British to say afterward that it was all the maharaja's doing? No, you ass!

"At the conference he agreed solely on condition that the commissioner *sahib* should sign the letter and relieve his Highness of all blame in case of a verdict of madness. And it was decided to send an American, lest there be too much talk among the British themselves. Now do you understand?"

"Hah! I understand. If all this is true the matter is easy. I will send one of the guard with that letter to the maharaja *sahib*. He will write his name on it and send it back, and all is well."

"Suit yourself!" sneered Tom Tripe. "The maharaja *sahib* is with his dancing-girls this minute. What happened to the last man who interrupted his amusements?"

THE Rajput hesitated. The answer to that question could be seen any day near the place they call the Old Gate, where beggars sit in rags.

"Shall I offer him money?" whispered Tess.

"For ——'s sake, no, lady! The man's a decent soldier. He'd refuse it and we'd all be in the apple-cart! Leave him to me."

He turned again on the Rajput.

"You know who I am, don't you? You know it's my duty to see that the palace guards attend to business, eh? That's why I'm here tonight. His Highness particularly warned me to see that if anything unusual wanted doing it should get done. If you want to question my authority you'll have it out with me before his Highness in the morning first thing."

The Rajput obviously wavered. Everybody knew that the first thing in the morning was no good time to appear on charges before a man who spent his nights as Gungadhura did.

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"Who is to enter? A man and a woman?"

"No, you idiot! A lady doctor only. And nobody's to know. You'd better warn your men that if there's any talk about this night's business the palace guard will catch the first blast of the typhoon. Gungadhura's anger isn't mild in these days!"

"Show me the letter again," said the Rajput. "Let me keep it in case I am brought to book."

Tom translated that to Tess and her husband.

"It's this way, ma'am. If you let him keep the letter I suspect he'll let you in. But he may show it to the maharaja in the morning, and then there'll be hot fat in the fire. If you don't let him keep it, perhaps he'll admit you and perhaps he won't; but if he keeps the letter and trouble comes of it, he and I'll both be in the soup!

"Never mind about me. Maybe I'm too valuable to be sent packing. I'll take the chance. But this man's a decent soldier, and he'd be helpless."

"Let him keep it," said Tess.

Tom turned on the Rajput again.

"Here's the letter. Take it. But mark this! What his Highness wants tonight is discretion. There might be promotion for a man who'd say nothing about this night's work. If, on top of that, he was soldier enough to keep his men from talking he'd be reported favorably to his Highness by Tom Tripe.

"Who got you made a corporal, eh? Who stood up for you when you were charged with striking Gullam Singh? Was Tom Tripe's friendship worth having then? Now suit yourself! I've said all I'm going to say."

The Rajput muttered also something in his beard, stared again at the letter as if that of itself would justify him, looked sharply at Tess, whose hamper might or might not be corroborative evidence, folded the letter away in his tunic pocket and made a gesture of assent.

"Now, lady, hurry!" said Tom. "And here's hoping you're right about there being no hell! I've told lies enough tonight to damn my soul forever! Once you're safely through the gate I'll have a word or two more with the guard, and then your husband and I will go to a place close by that I know of and wait for you."

But Tess objected to that.

"Please don't leave me waiting for you in the dark outside the gate! Why not keep the carriage here? My husband won't mind."

"Might make talk, ma'am. I'll leave Trotters here to watch for you. He'll bring word in less than a minute."

Tom Tripe dismounted to help her out of the dog-cart. The Rajput struck the iron gate as if he expected to have to wake the dead and take an hour about it.

But it opened suspiciously quickly and a bearded Afridi, of all unlikely people, thrust an expectant face outward, rather like a tortoise emerging from its shell, blinking as he tried to recognize the shadowy forms that moved in the confusing lamplight. He seemed to know whom to expect and admit, for he beckoned Tess with a long, crooked forefinger the moment she approached the gate, and in another ten seconds the iron clanged behind her, shutting her off from husband and all present hope of succor. The chance of any rescuer's entering the palace that night, whether by force or subtlety, was infinitesimal.

The strange gateman—he had a little kennel of a place to sleep in just inside the entrance—snatched the hamper from Tess and led her almost at a run across an ancient courtyard whose outlines were nearly invisible except where the yellow light of one ancient oil lantern on an iron bracket showed a part of the palace wall and a steep flight of stone steps, worn down the middle by centuries of sandals. Everything else was in gloom and shadow, and only one chink of light betrayed the whereabouts of a curtained window.

The Afridi led her up the stone steps, and paused at the top to hammer on a carved door with his clenched fist; but the door moved while his fist was in mid-air and the merry-eyed maid who opened it mocked him for a lunatic. Dumb, apparently, in the presence of woman, he slunk down the steps again, leaving Tess wondering whether it were not good manners to remove her shoes before entering. Natives of the country always removed their shoes before entering her house, and she supposed it would be only decent to reciprocate.

However, the maid took her by the hand and pulled her inside without further ceremony, not letting go of the hand even to close the door, but patting it and making

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much of her, smiling the welcome that they had no words in common to express. The little outer hall in which they stood was shut off by curtains six yards high, all smothered in a needlework of peacocks that generations of patient fingers must have toiled at.

Pulling those apart, the maid led her into an inner hall fifty or sixty feet long, the first sight of which banished all diffidence about her shoes; for never had she seen such medley of East and West, such toning down of oriental mysticism with the sheer utility of European importations; and that without incongruity.

THE lamps, of which there were dozens, were mostly Russian. Some of the furniture was Buhl, some French. There were hangings that looked like loot from the Peking Summer Palace, and tapestry from Gobelins.

In a place of honor on a side wall was an ikon, framed in gold, and facing that an image of the Buddha done in greenish bronze, flanked by a Dutch picture of the Twelve Apostles with laughably Dutch faces receiving instruction on a mountain from a Christ whose other name was surely Hans.

Down the center of the hall, leading to a gallery, was a magnificent stairway of marble and lapis lazuli, carpeted with long Bokhara strips so well joined end to end that the whole looked like one piece. And at the top of those stairs Yasmini stood waiting, her golden hair illuminated by glass lamps on either marble column at the stairhead. She was as different from the Gunga Singh of riding-boots and turban as the morning is from night—the loveliest bewitchingest girl in silken gossamer that Tess had ever set eyes on.

"I knew you would come!" she shouted gleefully. "I knew you would get in! I knew you are my friend! Oh, I'm glad! I'm glad!"

She pirouetted a dozen times on bare toes at the top of the stairs, spinning until her silken skirts expanded in a nimbus, then danced down-stairs into Tess' arms, where she clung, panting and laughing.

"I'm so hungry! Oh, I'm hungry! Did you bring the food?"

"I'm ashamed!" Tess answered. "The man set it down outside the door and I left it there."

But Yasmini gave a little shrill of delight, and Tess turned to see that another man had brought it.

"How many of you are there?"

"Five."

"Thank Heaven! I've brought enough for a square meal for a dozen."

"We have eaten a little, little bit each day of the servants' rice, washing it first for hours, until today, when two of the servants were taken sick and we thought perhaps their food was poisoned too. Oh, we're hungry!"

Hasamurti, Yasmini's maid, opened the basket on the floor and crowed aloud. Tess apologized.

"I knew nothing about the caste restrictions, but I've put in meat jelly—and bread—and fruit—and rice—and nuts—and milk—and tea—and wine—and sugar——"

Yasmini laughed.

"I am as Western as I choose to be, and only pretend to caste when I see fit. My maids do as I do, or they seek another mistress. Come!"

Hasamurti would have spread a banquet there on the floor, but Yasmini led them all up-stairs, holding Tess by the hand, turning to the right at the stairhead into a room all cream and golden, lighted by hanging lamps that shone through disks of colored glass. There she pulled Tess down beside her on to a great, soft divan and they all ate together, the maids munching their share while they served their mistress. They devoured the milk, and left the wine, eating, all things considered, astonishingly moderately.

"Now we ought all to go to sleep," announced Yasmini, yawning, and then bubbling with delighted laughter at the expression of Tess' face. "The people outside might wait!"

"Great Heavens, child! Do you suppose I can stay here indefinitely?" Tess demanded. "I must be gone in an hour or my husband will murder the guard and force an entrance!"

"I will have just such a husband soon," announced Yasmini. "When I send him one little word, he will cut the throats of thirty men and come to me through flames!

"Let us try your husband," she added as an afterthought—then laughed again at Tess' expression of dissent, and nodded.

"I, too, will be careful how I risk my husband! Men are but moths in a woman's hands—fragile—but the good ones are

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precious. Besides, we have no time tonight for sport. I must escape."

Evidently Tess was causing her exquisite amusement. The thought of being an accomplice in any such adventure stirred all her Yankee common sense to its depths, and she had none of the Eastern trick of not displaying her emotions.

"Nonsense, child! Let me go to the commissioner and warn him that you are being starved to death in this place. I will threaten him with public scandal if he doesn't put an end to it at once."

"Poof!" laughed Yasmini. "Samson *sahib* would make a nice clumsy accomplice! He would send me to Calcutta, where I should be poisoned sooner or later for a certainty, because Gungadhura would send agents to attend to that. They would wait months and months for their opportunity, and I can not always stay awake. Meanwhile Samson *sahib* would claim praise from his Government, and they would put some more initials at the end of his name, and promote him to a bigger district with more pay.

"No! Samson *sahib* shall have another district surely, but even he in his conceit will not consider it promotion. There will not be room for Samson *sahib* in Sialpore when I am maharanee!"

"You maharanee? It was you yourself who told me that Gungadhura has lots of children, who all stand between you and the throne. Do you mean——?"

Again the bell-like laugh announced utter enjoyment of Tess' bewilderment.

"No, I will kill nobody. I will not even send snakes in a basket to Gungadhura. That scorpion shall sting himself to death if he sees fit, with a ring of the fire of ridicule all about him, and no friends to console him, and no hope—nothing but disappointment and fear and rage. I will kill nobody. Yet I will be maharanee within the month!"

SUDDENLY she grew deadly serious, her young face darkening as the sky does when a quick cloud hides the sun.

"What is your husband's contract with Gungadhura? May he dig for gold anywhere? He is digging now, isn't he, close to the British fort on the 'island' in our territory—that fort with the flagstaff on it that can be seen from Gungadhura's roof? He is wasting time!"

"He has found a little vein of gold," said Tess, "that will likely lead to a bigger vein."

"He is wasting time! Sita Ram, who has a compass, and who knows all that goes on in Samson *sahib's* office, sent me word that the little vein of gold runs nearly due north.

"In another week at the rate the men are digging your husband will be under the fort. That is English territory. The English have nothing to do with Gungadhura's contract. They will take the gold your husband finds and give him nothing. Then Samson *sahib* would be considered a most excellent commissioner and would surely get promotion. Poof!"

"Perhaps my husband can make a separate bargain with the English."

"Poof! Samson *sahib* is an idiot, but he is not fool enough to give away what would be in his hands already. I myself, hidden beneath your window, heard him give you clear warning on that point. No, there must be another plan. Your husband must dig elsewhere."

"But, my dear, Gungadhura knows already that my husband has found a 'leader.' He is all worked up about it, and goes every day to watch the progress."

"Surely—knowing as well as I do that the vein is leading toward the fort. He goes afterward to the priests, and prays that the vein of gold may turn another way and save him from bankruptcy.

"Listen! I speak truth. I speak to you woman to woman—womb to womb! I will count myself accursed, and will let a cobra bite me if I tell you now one word that is not true. Do you believe I am going to tell you the truth?"

Tess nodded. Yasmini, by her own admission, would lie deliberately when that suited her; but the truth tells itself, as it were, and there is no mistaking it, except by such as lie invariably, of whom there is a multifarious host.

"If your husband continues digging near the fort he will get nothing, because the English will take it all. If he digs in a certain other place he will get a very great fortune."

"But my dear, supposing that is quite true, how shall he convince Gungadhura, after all the outlay and expense of the present operations, that it's best to abandon them and begin all over again in another place?"

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Yasmini lay back on the cushions, drew something out from under one of them, and laughed softly, as if enjoying a deep underflow of secret information.

"Gungadhura himself shall insist on it."

"What? On starting again in a new place?"

Yasmini nodded.

"Only do as I say, and Gungadhura himself shall insist."

"What do you wish me to do?"

Tess was beginning to feel alarmed again. She knew to a rupee how much Gungadhura had been obliged to pay out for the digging. To make herself responsible even in degree for the abandonment of all that outlay would be risky, even if no other construction could be placed on it.

"Has Tom Tripe been told to search your house?"

"Yes, so he says."

"Do you know the cellar of your house?"

"Yes."

"It is dark. Are you afraid to go there?"

"No. Why?"

"Is there a flat stone in a corner of the cellar floor that once had a ring in it but the ring is broken out?"

"Good. Then Sita Ram did not lie to me. Take this."

She gave her a little silver tube, capped at either end and sealed heavily with wax.

"There is a writing inside it—done in Persian. Hide that under the stone, and let Tom Tripe search the cellar and find it there; but forbid him to remove it."

"If I only knew what you are driving at!" said Tess with a wry smile.

A clumsier conspirator might have lost the game at that point by over-emphasis, for Tess was wavering between point-blank refusal and delay that would give her time to consult her husband. But Yasmini, even at that age, was adept at feeling her way nicely. Again she lay back on the cushions, and this time lighted a cigaret, smoking lazily.

"The stake that I am playing for—the stake that I shall surely win," she said after a minute, "is too big to be risked. If you are afraid, let us forget all that I have said. Let us be friends and nothing more."

Tess did not answer. She recognized the appeal to her own pride, and ignored it. What she was thinking of was Gungadhura's beastliness—his attempts to poison Yasmini—his treatment of women generally—his cruelty to animals in the arena—his viciousness; and then, of how much more queenly, if nothing else, this girl would likely be than ever Gungadhura could be kingly. It was tempting enough to have a hand in substituting Yasmini for Gungadhura on the throne of Sialpore if the chance of doing it were real.

Yasmini seemed able to read her thoughts or at all events to guess them.

"When I am maharanee," she said, "there will be an end of Gungadhura's swinishness. Moreover, promises will all be kept, unwritten ones as well as written. Gungadhura's contracts will be carried out. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, I think I believe that."

"Let Tom Tripe find that silver tube in your cellar then. But listen! When Gungadhura comes to your husband and insists on digging elsewhere, let your husband bargain like a huckster. Let him at first refuse. It may be that Gungadhura will let him continue where he digs at present, and will himself send men to start digging in the other place. In that case, well and good."

"I would prefer that," said Tess. "My husband is a mining engineer. I think he would hate to abandon a true lead for a whim of some one else."

YASMINI'S bright eyes gleamed intelligence. She was only learning in those days to bend people to her own imperious will and to use others' virtues for her own ends as readily as their vices.

She recognized the necessity of yielding to Tess' compunctions, more than suspecting that Dick Blaine would color his own views pretty much to suit his wife's in any case. And with a lightning ability peculiar to her she saw how to improve her own plan by yielding.

"That is settled, then," she said lazily. "Your husband shall continue to dig near the fort, if he so wishes. But let him show Samson *sahib* some specimens of the gold—how little it is—how feeble—how uncertain. Be sure he does that, please. That will be the end of Gungadhura. And now it is time to escape from here, and for you to help me."

Tess resigned herself to the inevitable. Whatever the consequences, she was not willing to leave Yasmini to starve or be poisoned.

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"I'm ready," she said. "What's the plan?"

"I shall leave all the maids behind. They have food enough for the morning. In the morning, after it is known that I have escaped, word shall be sent to Samson *sahib* that the women in this palace have nothing but poisoned food to eat. He must beard Gungadhura about that or lose his own standing with the English."

"But how will you escape?"

"Nay, that is not the difficulty. Your husband and Tom Tripe are waiting with the carriage. My part is easy. This is the problem: How will you follow me?"

"I don't understand."

"I must wear your clothes. In the dark I shall get past the guard, making believe that I am you."

"Then how shall I manage?"

"You must do as I say. I can contrive it. Come, the maids and I will make a true Rajputni of you. Only I must study how to walk as you do; please walk along in front of me—that way—follow Hasamurti through that door into my room. I will study how you move your feet and shoulders."

Looking back as she followed Hasamurti, Tess witnessed a caricature of herself that made her laugh until the tears came.

"It is well!" said Yasmini. "This night began in hunger, like the young moon. Now is laughter without malice. In a few hours will be bright dawn—and after that success!"

AN ELEPHANT INTERLUDE

WATCH your step where the elephants sway
Each at a chain at the end of a day,
Hurrumdi-diddlidi-um-di-ay!
Nothing to do but rock and swing,
Clanking an iron picket-ring,
Plucking the dust to flirt and fling;
Keep etceteras out of range,
Anything out of the way or strange
Suits the elephant folk for change—
Various odds and ends appeal
To liven the round of work and meal.
Curious trunks can reach and steal!
Fool with Two-tails if you dare;
Help yourself. But, fool, beware!
Whatever results is your affair!
We are the easiest beasts that be,
Gentle and good and affectionate we.
You are the monarchs; we bow the knee,
Big and obese and obedient—um!
Just as long as it suits us—um!
Hurrumti-tiddle-di-um-ti-um!

(Unfortunately at this point Akbar's attention was diverted to another matter, so the rest of his picket-song goes unrecorded.)

CHAPTER VIII

"They're elephants, and I'm a soldier. The trouble with you is nerves, my boy!"

THERE was brandy in the place that Tom Tripe knew of—brandy and tobacco and a smell of elephants. Dick Blaine, who scarcely ever touched strong liquor, having had intimate acquaintance with abuse of it in Western mining-camps, had to sit and endure the spectacle of Tom's chief weakness, glass after glass of the fiery stuff descending into a stomach long since rendered insatiable by soldiering on peppery food in a climate that is no man's friend. He protested a dozen times.

"We may need our wits tonight, Tom. Suppose we both keep sober."

"Man alive, I've been doing this for years. Brandy and brains are the same in my case. Keep me without it, and by bedtime I'm an invalid. Give me all I want of it, and I'm a crafty soldier-man."

Dick Blaine refilled his pipe and watched for an opportunity. He had heard that kind of argument before, and had conquered flood and fire with the aid of the very men who used it, that being the gift—or whatever you like to call it—that had made him independent while the others drew monthly pay in envelops.

It was a low, oblong shed they sat in, with a wide door opening on a side street within four hundred yards of Yasmini's palace gate. It was furnished with a table, two chairs and a cot for Tom Tripe's special use whenever the maharaja's business should happen to keep him on night duty, his own proper quarters being nearly a mile away.

Alongside the shed was a very rough stable that would accommodate a horse or two, and the back wall was a mere partition of mud brick, behind which, under a thatched roof, were tethered some of the maharaja's elephants. There were two windows in the wall, through which one could see dimly the great brute's rumps as they swayed at their pickets restlessly. The smell came through a broken pane, and every once in a while the Blaines' horse, standing ready in the shafts outside with a blanket over him, squealed at it indignantly. Tom's horse dozed in the rough shed, being used to elephants.

Dick got up once or twice to peer through the window at the brutes.

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"Are they tethered fore and aft?" he wondered.

"No," Tom answered. "One hind foot only."

"What's to stop them from turning round and breaking down this rotten wall?"

"Nothing—except that they're elephants. They could break their picket-chains if they were minded to, same as I could break Gungadhura's head and lose my job. But I won't do it, and nor will they. They're elephants, and I'm a soldier.

"The trouble with you is nerves, my boy. Have some brandy. You're worried about your wife, but I tell you she's right as a trivet. I'd trust my last chance with that little princess. I've done it often. Brandy's the stuff to keep your hair on. Have some."

The bottle had been only three parts full. Tom poured out the last of it and set a stone jorum of rum in readiness on the table over against the wall.

"Wish we had hot water handy," he grumbled.

"Which of the elephants are tethered here?" asked Dick. "That big one that killed a tiger in the arena the other day?"

"Yes. Did you see that? Akbar was scarcely scratched. Quickest thing ever I saw—squealed with rage the minute they turned 'stripes' loose—chased him to the wall—downed him with a forefoot and crushed him into tiger jelly before you could say, 'British Constitution!' "

"I allow that tiger'd been kept in a cage too long," said Dick.

"Don't you believe it. He was fighting fit. But they'd given old Akbar a skinful of rum, and that turns him into a holy terror. He's quite quiet other times."

Dick looked at his watch. Tess had been in the palace about three hours, and he was confident she would come away as soon as possible if for no other reason than to put an end to his anxiety. She was likely to appear at the gate at any minute. At any minute Tom Tripe was likely to attack the jorum, and if present symptoms went for anything it would not take much of it to make him worse than useless. At present he was growing reminiscent.

"Once old Akbar had a belly-ache and they gave him arrak. They didn't catch him for two days. He pulled up his picket-stake and lit out for the horizon, chasing dogs and hens and monkeys and anything else he could find that annoyed him. Screamed like a locomotive. Horrid sight."

"Where does this road outside lead to?" asked Dick.

"Don't lead anywhere. Blind alley. Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

DICK was examining the wall between the shed they sat in and the stable-place next door. It was much stronger than the mud affair between them and the elephants. Tom Tripe had nearly finished his tumblerful, and there was madness in the air that night that made a man take awfully long chances.

"Do you suppose a man could lose his way in the dark between here and the palace gate?"

"Not even if he was as drunk as Noah. All he'd have to do 'ud be hold on to the wall and walk forward. The road turns a corner, but the walls are all blind and there's no other way but past the palace. You sit here, though, my boy. No need to try that. Your wife's all right."

"Well, maybe I'd better stay here."

"Sure."

"Do you suppose I could back the dog-cart into the shed where your horse is? I hardly like to leave my horse standing any longer in the open, yet he's better in the shafts in case we want him in a hurry."

"Yes, the door's wide enough."

"Then I'll do it."

"Suit yourself. But take some of that rum before you go outside. The night air's bad for your lungs. Help yourself and pass the bottle, as the Queen said to the Archbishop of Canterbury."

"All right, I will."

Dick poured a little on his handkerchief, thrust the handkerchief through the broken pane and waved it violently to spread the smell. It was cheap, immodest stuff, blatant with its own advertisement. Then he set the jorum down on the end of the table farthest from the wall, to the best of his judgment out of reach from the window.

"Come along, Tom," he said then. "Help me with the horse."

"What's your hurry? Take a drink first."

"No, let's take one together afterwards."

He took Tom by the shoulder and pushed him to his feet.

"The horse might break away. Come on, man; hurry!"

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Over his shoulder Dick could see a long trunk nosing its way gingerly through the broken pane and searching out the source of the alluring smell. He pushed Tripe along in front of him, and together they backed the dog-cart into the stable-place, making a very clumsy business of it for three reasons: Tom Tripe was none too sober; the horse was nearly crazy with fear of the uncanny brutes just beyond the wall; and Dick was in too much of a hurry for reasons of his own. However, they got horse and cart in backward, and the door shut before the crash came.

The crash was of a falling mud-brick wall, pushed outward by the shoulders of a pachyderm that wanted alcohol. The beast had had it out of all sorts of containers and knew the trick of emptying the last drop. The jorum was about his usual dose.

About two minutes later, while Dick and Tom Tripe between them held a horse in intolerable durance between the shafts, and Tom's horse out of sympathy kicked out at random into every shadow he could reach, the door and part of the wall of Tom's shed fell outward into the pitch-dark street as Akbar, eleven feet four inches at the shoulder, strode forward, conjecturing what worlds were yet to conquer. The other elephants stood motionless at their pickets.

A terrified mahout emerged through the débris like a devil from —— bunkers, calling to his elephant all the endearing epithets he knew, and cursing him alternately. The horses grew calmer and submitted to caresses, like children and all creatures that have intimate contact with strong men; and presently the night grew still.

"D'you suppose that brute swiped my liquor?" wondered Tom Tripe. "You mind the horses while I look."

But suddenly there was a savage noise of trumpeting up-street, followed by a bark and a yelp of canine terror.

"——!" swore Tom. "That's Trotters coming to fetch us. Akbar's chasing him back this way. Hang on to the horse like ten men. I'll go see."

He was outside before Dick could remonstrate. Between them they had lashed the dog-cart wheels during the first panic, but even so Dick had his hands full as the trumpeting drew nearer and the horse went into agonies of senseless fear. It was a fight, nothing less, between thinking man and mere instinctive beast, and eventually Dick threw him with a trick of the reins about his legs, and knelt on his head to keep him down. By the grace of the powers of unexpectedness neither shafts nor harness broke.

Outside in the darkness Tom Tripe peered through brandied eyes at a great shadow that hunted to and fro a hundred yards away, chasing something that was quite invisible, and making enough noise about it to awake the dead.

"Trotters!" he yelled. "Trotters!"

A moment later a smaller shadow came into view at top speed, panting, chased hotly by the bigger one.

"Trotters! Get back where you came from! Back; d'ye hear me? Back!"

Within ten yards of his master the dog stopped to do his thinking, and the elephant screamed with a sort of hunter's ecstasy as he closed on him with a rush. But thought is swift, and obedience good judgment. The dog doubled of a sudden between Akbar's legs, and the elephant slid on his rump in the futile effort to turn after him—then crashed into the wall opposite Tripe's dismantled shed—cannoned off it with a grunt of sheer disgust—and set off up-street, once more in hot pursuit.

"That brute got my good rum, —— him!" said Tom, opening the stable door. "Hello! Horse down? Any harm done? Right-oh! We'll soon have him up again. Better hurry now—Trotters came for us."

TO BE CONTINUED

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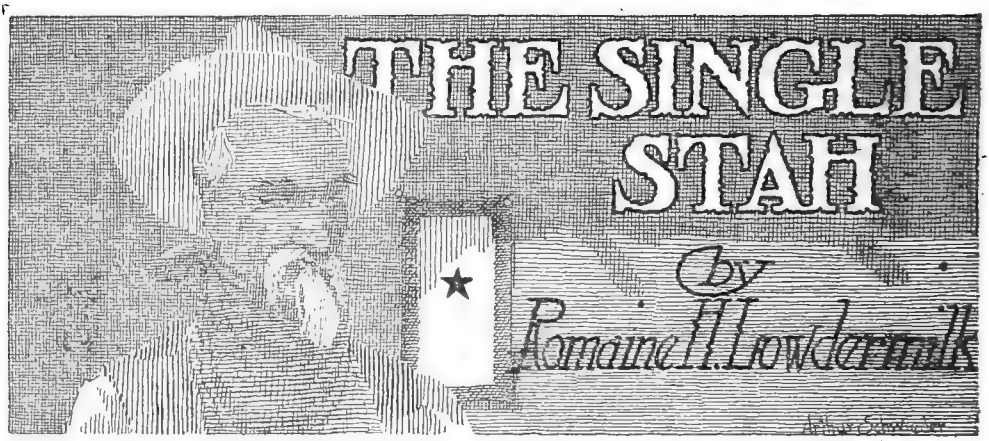

Author of "The Spirit of His Youth," "Three Wise Men," etc.

OLD Reb Thunder spurred his horse up the slope. His hat was thrown back and the sparse hair showed gray and wispy beneath the wide brim. His cheeks, seasoned by seventy-seven years, were ruddy and firm above the wide-flung gray mustaches and the Southern-style goatee.

Old Reb sat his saddle in a manner that many a younger man might envy, yet there was a baffled look as of weariness about the faded blue eyes that betrayed something health and a powerful physique had failed to overcome. Some great sorrow—or fear—was in Reb Thunder's eyes.

His bridle reins dangled carelessly from the hook that stood him in stead of a left hand. With his right he flapped the end of his rawhide lariat against the leather of his chaps in an utterly carefree manner as he chanted the rousing song his youth had known so well:

"Hurrah, boys, hurrah! The South'rn Rights, hurrah!
We'll rally eroun' the bonny blue flag
Thet bears the single stah."

Reb Thunder had originated in South Carolina where "star" could be pronounced "stah" to rime with "hurrah" in all consonance with established principles.

The keen morning air of the high Sierras was fresh with the tang of Spring and the new day. Already the gramma grass was showing green along the mesas and little calves bobbed experimentally among the Herefords that dotted Reb Thunder's range.

And that was what Reb was out looking after—calves. Old Reb was a good cowman and nothing gave him more pleasure than to get the majority of his calf-crop branded before the Spring round-up began to comb the hills.

As he topped the rise he saw, approaching along the double-rutted trail that served as a wagon road, a spring wagon. "Paper-Says" Tucker and his wife occupied the seat; in the spacious rear were massed their offspring.

To see this aggregation out so early and so apparently on an excursion roused old Reb's curiosity. He ceased his singing, forgot all about calves and the bonny blue flag and loped across to inquire in a neighborly way what was the occasion of such an early-morning exodus.

"Why, ain't you heard?" exclaimed the neighbor. "Paper says today's the day the boys go through."

Old Reb missed the point entirely. His blank look prompted the other to full explanation.

"Yeh; three troop-trains an' a—a reggimental band! Paper says they been a-doin' pat-rol along th' border an' now they're bound for France. Paper says they'll stop off at Monarch City to sort of exercise up a bit. Three train, an' a—a—brass band, paper says."

"Soldiers?" queried Reb.

"Sure."

"Nawth'ners?"

"Dunno; paper didn't say. Come from everywheres, I guess. Paper says they're headed for France an' the ladies are a-goin' to give 'em a big feed as they go through

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town. Everybody's invited, an' we're a-hurryin' to see it. Better come along; plenty time. Paper says trains'll be there 'bout ten. S'long."

"Huh," commented Reb as he watched the teeming rig bounce away over the rough road. "Huh. Yanks!"

Old Reb reined his horse about and set him hurrying toward the home ranch. He was piqued to know more of the occasion. To get a paper and read about it was out of the question—old Reb had been grubbing in the clearing back in South Carolina when the age of learning was upon him. Boys didn't learn to read much when he was young, anyhow.

But lately old Reb felt sort of wishful that he had somehow learned to read. The evenings seemed longer and lonelier than they used to before he turned seventy-seven.

"Sev'nty-sev'n," muttered old Reb whimsically. "That's old—tarnation old. But I don't feel 't. Ef 'twasn't fer bein' a —a—deserter—" Reb's voice choked at the word, but he made it say it—"I'd sell out hyar an' go back home. Thar'd be a plenty. I'd buy the ol' clearin' an' raise me some roastin'-years an' some sweet 'taters—an' git me a dawg an' hunt me up a 'possum——"

Old Reb's voice droned off into unintelligible rumblings. Since old age had sat upon him he found his thoughts turned more to eating than to anything else, and he craved the good things of the South—things not to be obtained in the range country of Arizona where for more than half a century he had followed the steer.

A HALF-HOUR later Reb's horse was tied to the hitch-rail outside the home cabin and old Reb was inside intently loading a tomato-can with a mixed charge of giant powder and heavy bolt-taps. To see him one might have mistaken him for some sort of Bolshevist manufacturing a bomb. But a glance at his cowboy boots with their heels and silver-mounted spurs; his straight spine and straightforward countenance would quite dispel any illusion of things red.

Still, it really was a bomb, and Reb Thunder was thinking anarchistic, treasonable thoughts. Old Reb was concocting a vicious explosive bomb, crude but effective, to be used in what to him seemed a gigantic reprisal, a Heaven-sent opportunity to revenge the South for the indignities she had suffered from the North and to avenge himself for the loss of his hand, his property and his family.

Fifty-seven years before South Carolina seceded from the Union and Thunder had seceded with her. The State had been received back into the Union but Thunder, undeniably a deserter from the Confederate ranks, had remained seceded; he had remained a rebel. And now was an opportunity to show he was still true to the faith he had once, in a moment of extreme need, deserted!

As he worked with his bomb Reb's faded eyes sought out the three flags that hung over his spacious fireplace. They were flags he had brought into the country with him fifty-odd years ago. At the right was the Confederate battle-flag; at the left was the flag of the South, the Stars and Bars; between and above them spread the first flag of the Rebellion, the flag of the first State to secede from the Union, the flag of South Carolina, Reb's State and Reb's flag—the Bonny Blue Flag.

Through all the years that flag had been the watch-light of Reb Thunder. The thrill he experienced when first he saw the flag and realized what it stood for had not faded, nor had the rousing words of the song lost any of their stirring import. As he steadily wrapped and rewrapped his bomb with wire he hummed the crude words fervently:

"Here's to Virginny, the ol' Dominion State,
Who with the young Confederacy at las' did link her fate.
Impelled by her example, let otheh States prepare
To rally eroun' the bonny blue flag
Thet bears the single stah."

Carrying the bomb, Reb went out and tied it in the slicker on his saddle, where with a single slash of a knife he could bring it into use. Then he mounted Traveler. It was nine miles to Monarch City; the horse could make it in an hour and a half without hurrying. Reb figured he would get to town about the hour the soldiers should arrive.

He leaned over and patted Traveler's arched neck.

"Rack along, ol' hoss," he said. "This is likely yore last trip. You're tough an' you kin stand a lot; but I dunno about this hyar bomb. Still, Gin'ral Lee's Traveler

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campaigned all through with the Army of Nawth'rn Virginny an' lived to foller Lee's funeral hearse to the grave. So step to 't, pony; we'll likely do big things, too, afore night."

Reb reined Traveler into the familiar trail toward Monarch and looped the reins conveniently over his hook. With his right hand he deftly rolled a brown cigaret. Flicking a match to it, he settled himself easily in the saddle, his face raised innocently to the sky-line and his wide hat pulled down to his nose. As he rode he hummed, as was his wont when on the long rides, a few bars from his favorite, "The Bonny Blue Flag."

He felt much as he had when on that early morning 'way back in '61 he and his young bride, Dolly, had ridden the old mule into the little South Carolina town where he bravely kissed his Dolly good-by and took his place in the colorful ranks of the Zouave Cadets as they marched away that morning under Captain Chichester to join the First Regiment of Rifles, Fourth Brigade, South Carolina. He had been exalted then, even as he was now. He had not known where or into what he was going then; but he surely did know where he was going this time, and also what he was going to do when he got there.

Of course, old Reb mused, he was older now, and naturally knew more. In those old days all he knew was that the boys were all going off somewhere to wipe out of existence a vague sort of being locally known as Themdamyanks. Young Tom Thunder—old Reb was young Tom those days—had gone off to war impressed that it was his duty as a loyal citizen of the South to hate Themdamyanks; and that feeling had grown until in the last year of the war it positively engulfed him.

For it had been in that last dark twelvemonth that the Southern women, brave as they were, rich and poor alike, could no longer conceal from their soldier husbands the dire straits in which they had come. Letters drifted into camp telling of want and famine at home.

A comrade back from furlough brought word from the little clearing where young Tom Thunder had left his Dolly. There was a baby boy there, able to walk and talk, but there was no one to put in the crop. The young wife was worn out with the years of the black struggle; and besides the mule had been taken and the cattle driven off. God alone knew where food was to come from.

So it was that early in '65, torn with love for his wife and son and fidelity to the bonny blue flag, young Thunder slipped out of the Confederate ranks, even as hundreds, yes thousands of his comrades were doing, and started back home to put in the crop, meaning to return to the ranks as soon as that was done.

WHEN he made his way back to the little clearing that had been their home he found the cabin half-burned. The weathered carcass of the hound lay by the sill as if he had fallen defending the entrance to the home. The crude furnishings were scattered about the once trim dooryard, fences were down and the fields trampled and vine lush.

Tom Thunder knew what had happened. Sherman had set out in November of '64 to "make Georgia howl;" his operations had taken in South Carolina.

Young Thunder, heartsick, made inquiry for his wife and child. Finally he learned that she had taken the child and gone to the city in search of work—where, none knew.

He wasted two weeks searching town after town for his wife, all the while fearing lest he would be found and tried as a deserter. Technically he was a deserter, but not in heart or faith. He had meant to plant the crop and go straight back to the colors.

Suddenly he realized that he must go back, must give up his search and return to his company; but before he could get through to his comrades General Lee had surrendered. Chaos was in the South; banks had failed; Confederate bonds were worthless; the country was drained of every resource.

Despairing of finding his family and fearful of being recognized as a deserter, young Thunder joined a wagon-train going West. Two years later he settled in Arizona at his present location.

Fifty-odd years later found him still believing himself a deserter, but still loyal to the cause, still a rebel harboring hatred for Themdamyanks who had deprived him of his home, his hand, his family and his honor. So now he rode Traveler toward Monarch City in a glorified halo of patriotic

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zeal, determined to strike this one more blow for the South'rn Rights.

Reaching behind the cantle, old Reb felt of the bomb lashed there. Even through the folds of the slicker he could tell that it was a deadly thing, an infernal machine. Smilingly Reb rolled another cigaret, and in rhythmical accompaniment to Traveler's steady movements he jingled his spurs, flapped his rope and dashed off a few bars:

"With Davis fer our Presi-*dent* an' Stevens a statesman *rar*',
We'll rally eroun' th' bonny blue *flag*
Thet bears th' single *stah*."

An hour later he rode into Monarch City. The sixteen residences were unpeopled; dust blew in at the open windows and wind slammed the doors with no hand to say them nay. Both the stores were closed. Not even a single bum lounged about the wide doors of Perry's Pool Palace; not a Mexican woman was left about the section-house. The populace was down at the railway station to view the troops.

Blind rage dulled Reb's senses for the moment—anger that these Southern people should stoop to do honor to troops that represented the hated Union. How could they have sunk so low?

Old Reb straightened himself in the saddle. Here at least was a man who stood by his convictions. He still stood up for the South'rn Rights, and what's more he would show them he could do it in a hemanly way.

"Jus' one look at them boys in blue," Reb grumbled, "an' there'll be a scatteration that'll be heard of from Phœnix to Philly-delfa an' from thar back to yar."

The old unreasoning hate of things North'rn welled up in him, and he unbuttoned his vest so as better to get at the great Colt .44 that reposed in the shoulder against his ribby side. He took his keen jack-knife from his pocket and opened it, an operation that involved the hook and considerable skill. This he placed in his right vest pocket for quick work in freeing the bomb and splitting the fuse.

As he neared the station the sight of the entire population of Monarch City frantically greeting the long troop-trains that already blocked the main line and the siding irked him mightily.

"Themdamyanks," he muttered through his teeth; but he too craned for a glimpse of the boys in blue.

His old eyes were unequal to the task; he couldn't make out a single blue-clad figure. Nettled, paying no heed to the cheery greetings shouted to him by friends and acquaintances, he spurred Traveler forward.

Then all at once he saw! There, marching toward him, not fifty yards away, was a column of men, soldiers, four abreast. The sight took his breath away. His old heart jumped and then missed a beat with a suddenness that almost surprized him out of the saddle.

He yanked Traveler to a sudden halt that wrenched a snort from that usually unperturbed animal.

"Tarnation!" gasped old Reb. "Them ain't—ain't—soldiers!"

Which wasn't what he meant to say at all. Merely he had been expecting blue, and the khaki-clad ranks upset him.

"Why—why——"

And he gaped open-mouthed at the passing column.

There was something about these even ranks marching by that ran a cold chill along old Reb's spine. There was a deadly precision, an absolute mechanical certainty, about their equipment and movements that spelled unrelenting efficiency. So different from the ragged lines of the armies in Reb's day.

The same sort of feeling came over him while he watched the machine-like column tread past as when he'd stand by the water that rushed down the mountain torrent back at the ranch—a sense of something irresistible, of a hidden power no man could stay, of such an unending supply that even though one removed gallons, or tons, or thousands, there would be no apparent lessening of the whole. Old Reb felt very small and very powerless.

JUST then he remembered about the bomb. That heartened him. He too had a force. He too had power, power to destroy a goodly portion of these dapper, machine-made soldiers, this fighting-machine in yellow breeches who stood up for the Union.

Just he'd wait till he got a mess of 'em gathered around the cookie-stand, the lemonade-barrel—old Reb sniffed—then he'd pot a bunch. Just like a pot-shot at a

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huddle of quail under a bush; just like!

Nervously he felt back of the saddle. The bomb was still there. Reb twiddled his vest to see if he could get out the old .44 in a hurry and fingered the pocket to see if the knife was still open and ready. All was well.

Clumsily Reb lighted another cigaret. He was prepared. Cautiously he moved Traveler nearer the booths where the soldiers were gathering.

A band started playing. The staccato of the snare-drums and the booming of the bass thrilled old Reb as nothing had since the early days of '61 when the Confederate ranks still carried music. It had been many a year since he had heard a band, or the drums.

The sudden shrilling of fifes brought old Reb up straight. The booming of the war-drums and the shrilling of the fifes took him back half a century. How the memory warmed his heart! The thrill of the music swept him back again to the colorful ranks of the Zouaves.

He was marching again, waving good-by to his Dolly. Old Reb was back in South Carolina, and the people were calling good-bys as the Zouaves marched away.

It was a medley of patriotic tunes the band was playing, and Reb listened dazedly with a feeling that some of the music was vaguely familiar until there came the unmistakable strains of "Marching through Georgia"—that hated melody Sherman's men had introduced when they had trampled Georgia and South Carolina underfoot and disclosed the hollowness of the South. Unreasoning rage surged through the old rebel as that insulting tune welled about him, and he jerked out his knife and hacked once at the covering of his bomb.

No sooner had he made that first angry slash than the music swung into "Maryland, My Maryland." Reb poised the knife irresolutely, then slyly hid it in his gnarled palm.

He would wait a minute; there was no hurry. He'd get a chance to throw the bomb into a bigger bunch if he waited a minute. Anyway he wanted to hear that tune! First time in fifty years he'd heard "Maryland." He was mildly surprized this Yank band should be playing that tune—it was a whackin' good band, all right.

Maryland, my Maryland!
With Ringgold's spirit for the fray,
With Watson's blood at Monterey,
With fearless Lowe and dashing May
Maryland, my Maryland!

While old Reb's eyes were still dim with recollection and his blood beating high with excitement and wonder the medley rolled into the familiar bars of "The Bonny Blue Flag." As the great band poured forth the rousing strains old Reb Thunder rose in his stirrups and gave the rebel yell. Twice his voice quavered in that blood-curdling shriek, and under the spell of this strange Yank band that played Southern music he yanked out the old .44 and gave a couple of blasts into the air.

The crowd whooped; his name was echoed to the hills. Almost immediately, ashamed of what he had done and mindful of the stern business he had come to do, Reb thrust the gun back in its holster and whirled Traveler round a few times to cover his shame and confusion.

"Only four shells lef' in th' gun," he reminded himself; "three of Themdamyanks—an' me."

OUT of the crowd a young soldier had emerged and was walking straight for Reb and Traveler. Reb pulled up the horse and eyed the stranger apprehensively.

Could it be his bomb had been seen? Could this young fool in that trim uniform be coming out to arrest him?

Reb had an awful fight to resist the impulse to feel behind and see if that bomb had dropped out or was showing through the gash he had cut. Would he be court-martialed—and shot? Terrible thoughts flashed through his distressed brain as he watched the soldier's steady tread—straight for him.

Suddenly he felt very weak and old. Why had he brought that dang bomb here anyhow? Why hadn't he just stayed at home and let things go on as they were?

Of course he hated these Yanks; he hated all Themdamyanks; but what's the use for one lone old man to tackle the kit an' b'ilin' of 'em single-handed? Shucks, he'd gone an' got himself in a jackpot, or wuss!

"Is your name Thunder?" the young man was asking politely. "Is your name Tom Thunder?"

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Old Reb was speechless. Almost he was ready to deny the name. In panic he looked about. None seemed to be paying any attention. Dimly he heard the young soldier continue:

"I heard people speak your name, mister. They called you Tom Thunder. 'Reb' Thunder, some said. And I just wondered if your name really is Tom Thunder."

"Yes, sir," stammered old Reb in such a thin, wabbly voice that the sound of it startled him. He hemmed gruffly, attempting to bring it around to its natural tone.

The youth reached up his hand.

"My name's Thunder, too," he said. "My name is Tom Thunder. Isn't that funny? My father is a Tom Thunder, too."

The young hand was still stretched up toward old Reb.

Reb Thunder gazed in astonishment. Then his great bony hand reached down and crushed the younger's like a vise. Relief from his sudden panic and the native love of the Southerner for any one of his own name overwhelmed the old man. A suspicious squint dimmed the sunken old blue eyes.

"Tom Thunder!" old Reb exclaimed in unbelief. "Yore paw—too! Ef thet don't beat all!"

Old Reb paused and stared at the young soldier. He could seem to see something of himself as he had stood many years ago, in the garish uniform of the Zouaves.

There was a reflection of how he himself had appeared that morning so many years ago, filled with zeal and craving to serve the country. Old Reb could see himself in the stripling before him. It was the recognition of blood to blood.

"Is—is yore—" Reb deliberated a moment, then stumbled on—"is yore paw's maw—er, I'd ought to say, mought by any chance yore grandmaw's name be Dolly? Dolly?"

"Dolly Thunder," stated the young man. "Grandma Dolly Thunder. She lives back in Chicago with us—with dad and mother and me. And she's just the loveliest old lady. You'd like her fine if you ever met her.'

"Why, son," Reb sighed happily as he slipped down off Traveler to grasp the boy's hand again—"son, I'm—I'm yore grandpaw. Yore paw is my son."

Old Reb questioned, and the boy told the story as the troops entrained. Grandma Dolly Thunder had taken her baby boy and fled from the South early in '65 to start all over in the North at that most womanly of all occupations—running a boarding-house. The boarding-house had prospered and grown into a restaurant; then after many changes of location into a real hotel.

The baby boy—little Tom—had grown, attended school and the higher courses and gone into the business to succeed finally in taking the burden of management off his mother's shoulders until now Grandma Dolly Thunder, old Reb's girl wife, had but one burden—that her Tom, the husband and lover of her youth, could not be found to share the comforts their son Tom could give.

Old Reb's heart had filled with joy as the boy assured him his Dolly was alive and well. He forgot all about the bomb and eagerly plied questions until at last he waved farewell as he watched the youth leap aboard the moving train.

LONG after the trains had gone Reb stood, his arm across Traveler's patient shoulders, his eyes dim with the new wonder he had found. He roused himself to go about town and make a few purchases. Then, safely in the saddle with Traveler headed toward the ranch, he gave himself over to his reverie.

Late that evening, Traveler munching contentedly in the corral, old Reb sat by the cold ashes of his fireplace. He had made no preparation toward supper.

Finally he arose, got on a chair and removed the three flags from the wall. First he took down the Confederate battle-flag, then the Stars and Bars, and lastly the Bonny Blue Flag. In their place he hung a tiny flag—a new flag with a red border and a white center upon which reposed a single blue star. It was a service flag, a flag with a single star.

Carrying the three old flags, Reb went out and removed his saddle from the corral and gingerly untied the slicker. Carefully, almost reverently, he wrapped the three ancient banners about the bomb and tied them there.

He lighted the fuse and slung the gaudy bundle far down the cañon-side, where he heard it go rolling and tumbling toward the bottom.

"Dolly'd like f'r me to do this," Reb told

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himself. "The Nawth has been good to my Dolly—an' our little Tom an' his boy——"

Suddenly the air was rocked with a thunderous report. Reb jumped and Traveler leaped from his hay, snorting.

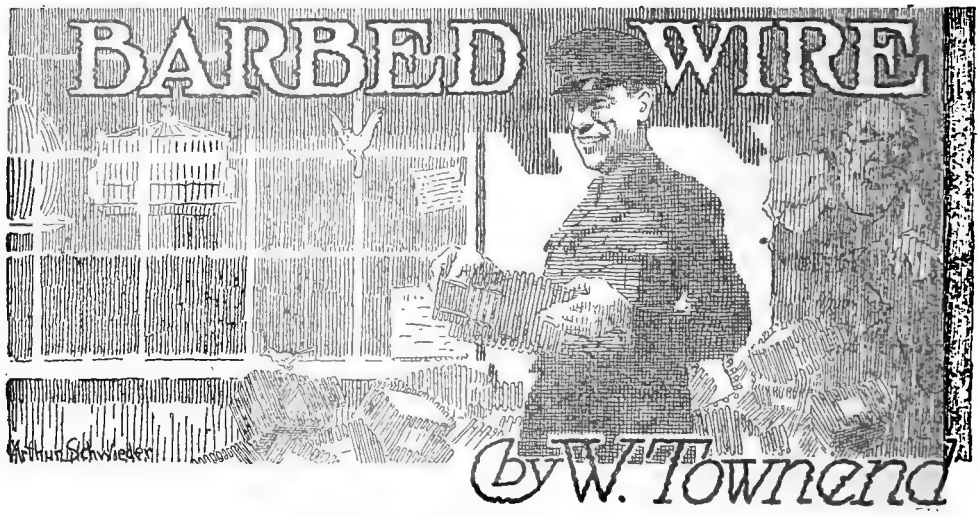
As the echoes ceased reverberating among the cañon-walls Traveler returned to his hay and old Reb, his eyes clearer than they had been in many a day, stepped with amazingly spry tread to his cabin and lighted a roaring fire in the grate. He sure was hungry.

Another day and he would start on a vacation. Somehow the thought of visiting folks in Illinois was not nearly so repugnant as it would have been at any time previously. Somehow old Reb felt his views changing about things Northern and Northern people.

As he went about preparing supper his thoughts strayed to green corn, sweet 'taters, 'possum—and his Dolly.

He glanced up at the little service flag and smiled happily as he caught himself humming those martial strains of long ago:

"We'll rally eroun' the bonny blue flag
Thet bears the single stah."



Author of "A Leader of Men," "The Other Side," etc.

HOME once more! The Terror laughed, rather muzzily, for the beer he had drunk had gone to his head and he felt good-natured and kind and gentle. He would at that moment, he knew, have spoken a friendly word to any one in the world, even a policeman. Presently, when he had wandered down the street and back—his street—his by right of conquest—not for nothing had they called him the Terror—he would return to the corner and would go into the Rose and Thistle and he would drink—gallons! And then imagination reeled at the prospect before him.

And he would see Kitty. The Terror chuckled. But she would have to explain why she hadn't answered his letters, of course. He wondered then if any other man had dared make up to her. If so—he frowned grimly—if so,——help them both!

Very slowly, holding himself very straight, because he was still in khaki, the Terror sauntered down the street, glancing about him with interest, noting the children at play and the cats asleep in the sun and the little shops that he remembered so well. Nothing had changed, not even the smell of dust and garbage and oranges. He was back in '14 once more and the war had never been fought, but that the wound in his leg still troubled him.

All at once the Terror halted, not quite certain whether the beer had affected his eyesight or not. Opposite, where old Mrs. Britswell had sold newspapers and sweets and picture post-cards, was a shop-front that was new to him, painted sky blue and

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with little cages piled up one on top of another, almost hiding the window.

Puzzled, the Terror crossed the street. In the cages he found birds, chaffinches and blackbirds and thrushes and starlings and linnets, and the cages were too small and the sun was pouring down and there was no shade, and yet they were in cages, behind bars, prisoners.

Yes, they were prisoners—and why? They ought to be singing and mating and building their nests.

For the next few minutes the Terror was busy, opening the doors of cages and taking out small birds and watching them fly away . . . over the housetops to the trees and fields and open country, until with a yell of rage a stout, pale-faced man rushed out of the shop and made a grab at his neck. The Terror gave the pale-faced man a push that sent him staggering against the front of his shop.

"You keep yer 'ands to yerself!" he said, throwing a chaffinch into the air and watching its startled flight in the direction of the Rose and Thistle.

And then the Terror, shaken by a smashing blow under the ear and mildly annoyed, hit hard at the pale-faced man's stomach and the pale-faced man sat down suddenly in the midst of the empty cages and a scream of joy went up from the crowd of children. The Terror laughed and continued to open cages, while the pale-faced man shouted for the police.

" 'Ere's a copper, soldier," said the children. "You better run."

"Run from a copper!"

The Terror smiled tolerantly.

"Here, wot are you doin'?" said a hard voice.

The last cage was in the Terror's hand, just as the policeman reached him. He opened the door and the bird was free.

"Why, 'ullo, Mac!" he said. "Like old times, ain't it?"

But there was no answering smile from the policeman. The pale-faced man was talking.

"Withaht a word o' warnin'. Just comes 'ere, he does, an' opens the cage doors—'ow many? Look at 'em! Empty—not a bird left. I give 'im in charge, y'understand. An' fer assault as well. I got plenty o' witnesses."

"Wot did yer do it for?" said the policeman, taking out his note-book. "You must 'ave 'ad some reason."

THE Terror pondered. Had he had a reason? Why, yes, of course. A reason . . . . Now, what *was* the reason?

And then he heard a wild scream and a woman calling him:

"Joe . . . Joe! Oh, it's Joe!" and he saw Kitty forcing her way toward him through the crowd—Kitty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining—Kitty, his Kitty, dressed in black, which rather puzzled him.

"Why, Kitty, girl!" he said.

She flung herself into his arms, sobbing.

"Joe, oh, Joe! I thought you was dead. You never answered my letters!"

"Now then!" said the policeman. "We can't have this kind of thing 'ere. Why did yer let them birds go?"

The effect of the beer was wearing off and the Terror cast a longing glance at the Rose and Thistle. And then he remembered.

"Why, o' course! I come along 'ere, Mac, an' seen them cages an' them birds an' I thought, 'Why, 'ere's prisoners, an' the war's over.' "

"Come off it!" said the policeman impatiently.

"Prisoners!" said the Terror in a bewildered way. "The sun shinin' an' the sky blue an' the Spring 'ere an' you shut up behind wire—barbed wire—miles of it! An' sentries with rifles an' bayonets fixed, an' if yer try an' escape, they shoot yer—an' nothin' to do, no exercise, not if yer try to escape—nothin'. You're wearin' the war-ribbons same as me, Mac, but you ain't been through it like I 'ave.

"Me, I was a prisoner o' war for three years an' six months in Germany. An' now I'm free. Understand? An' them birds—why, they're free, too. 'Ere, 'Orace," he said to the pale-faced man.

He put Kitty away from him and groped in his pocket and produced two one-pound notes.

" 'Orace, 'ere's two quid. You don't deserve a penny, you don't, puttin' birds in cages—they ain't worth two quid, anyway, are they, Mac? An' don't look like that, my little man, or I'll give you two quid's worth o' something else."

And then the Terror turned once more to the policeman who was staring at him with a queer, tight-lipped smile.

"I'll come quiet this once, Mac, just for

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the sake of old acquaintance. S'long, Kitty, girl, I'll see you some other time. What's it to be, Mac—fourteen days without the option?"

The big policeman glanced quickly to the left and then to the right.

"Three years an' six months, was it?" he said. "They 'ad me for six months, an' that pretty near killed me. It's the barbed wire that does it, ain't it? Here, Kitty, you take that man o' yours out o' this, sharp, an' don't let him get interferin' with what don't concern him. Understand? Hop it!"

Author of "No Wonder," "Sparing the Family Tree," etc.

DEAR HANK:

Well, Hank, the world does move, as has been said before, and there is lots of times when a feller ain't got no pen in hand; so them is likely a few of the reasons why you probably ain't wrote to me for so long, eh?

Nobody ever got eye-paralysis from getting too many letters from you, Hank, but you ain't much of a writer anyway, so I beg your pardon. Education is a great thing, and I'm getting more every day. You never had the advantages which have overcome me, but it's all in a lifetime, and we can't all be favored with things which are well and hearty.

Well, Hank, I've got a son and heir, and he's a humdinger. Must be about one month of age now, and we're both doing fine. Emmeline sure handed me some son, Hank, but I wish he had been born without the contaminating atmosphere of them darned Galesburgs. He's got my mouth and nose, and his eyes look just like mine do when I'm thinking up something to startle folks with.

Hank, I don't want you to hold it against me, but I wanted to name him after you. I said, "Hank is a good name," and my uncle by marriage speaks up like this: "For what? For this baby?"

I said, "What did you think I was naming—a comet or a new drink?"

Uncle Gabe looks at me and walks out. I got his goat, Hank. I asked Emmeline how she likes Hank; and she says, "Hank who?" and I says, "I thought I'd name my kid after my old friend Hank," and she says, "Do you mean Hank Peck?" and I says I did, and she says: "You got a lot of nerve, Dobie. Hank ain't no friend of yours, and besides he's nothing but a dish-faced puncher, and nothing to name a baby after."

I told her I knowed you wasn't nothing but a dish-faced puncher, but my friendship don't take no account of homely faces or occupation.

She says, "I've promised to let Uncle Gabe name the baby."

"All right," says I. "Hang a jinx on the kid and see if I care. Let him run a Circle G on the kid's left flank, cut a dewlap on his neck and call him Oscar, and she's O. K. with me, but I'll be —— if he's going to name him So-and-So Galesburg Dalton. I sure don't want no initial G in front of his family name."

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"Dobie," says she, "we are going to call him Gabriel, after uncle."

Hank, I growed mad all to once. The idea of calling a poor little, raw-looking hunk of yelps, which ain't got no opinion, after a big boob like my uncle by marriage!

Hank, I hate to say anything against my relation. Uncle Gabe is all right as far as he goes, but to me he's paralyzed in both hind legs, and you can't blame me for it.

I says to Emmeline, "Will he always be knowed as such?" and she says, "Why, of course," and I says to her: "Listen, honey. Man is of few days and full of trouble, which is natural for them and happens without no outside assistance; so why hang something like that on to the poor kid? Ain't he going to have no square deal? You folks stack the cards against the little stranger, and he ain't got *sabe* enough to play close to his stummick. You're a unnatural mother and are queering the kid."

Hank, as far as I'm concerned I don't care how long Uncle Gabe has been standing there in the door listening to me, 'cause there ain't nothing ever comes from my lips that I wouldn't say in your face. He walks over to my kid and pokes him in the stummick with his finger, and then he says: "How is 'ittle Gabie? Ootsie, ootsie."

Hank, you know how a animal acts when you tease its young? Even a fool hen will fight in a case like that; so I hopped right up, grabbed him by the back of the belt, and yanked him away.

"You heavy-handed wolf!" says I. "Don't you poke my kid. Keep your big paws off the son of Dobie Dalton, or I'll ride you ragged."

Hank, it's the simple little things in life that counts mostly. I'm quite a studier of human nature and I know things that nobody else ever thought about. Emmeline didn't want to hurt her uncle's feelings; so she blamed me for the whole thing. I've got a strong back and I can stand a lot without turning like a worm; so she opens up on me like this:

"Dobie, you never did have and never will have any sense. Uncle Gabe was just showing affection for little Gabie."

"Is that so?" I asks. "I suppose I spur a bad horse for the same reason, eh? I suppose I thumb a bronc because I'm affectionate to it. This here Galesburg family are a delusion and a snare, and I'm going to take the shadder of my face away from their door, and go where I'll be appreciated in full."

"You mostly always are, Dobie," says she, and I says, "Well, I've yet to see any appreciation," and then she says, "You're going to have seven years of hard luck, Dobie."

Hank, you likely don't know why, because you likely ain't never heard that you get seven years' hard luck when you bust a looking-glass. It wasn't exactly me what done it, Hank, which takes off a lot of the curse for good behavior. Anyway, it wasn't my looking-glass, and my uncle by marriage can blame himself, because he throwed me through it himself. I didn't go all the way through, because the bureau was against the wall, but I sure left my trademark.

When I went out I says to my uncle by marriage, "Did you know I was going away, Mister Man?" and he says, "I likely knowed it before you did."

He was just guessing, Hank, because I didn't know myself; so I says to him, "Tell me where I'm going," and he says, "I'll leave that to you, Dobie, but the longer you stay the more you'll wish you hadn't."

Hank, I hate to have anybody tell me what I ought to do, so I says to him, "All I ask is what I've got coming, and then I'll leave peaceful."

"Dobie," says he, "you never know when you've got all that is coming to you. I've got warts on my hands now from beating you up."

Hank, I got mad. No man or body of men can ever brag about licking me without making me mad. I comes from a good-looking lot of ancestors, and my blood tells in the end; so I flares up and says:

"Gabe Galesburg, you're a big fat-head! You're a descendant of Geronimo and Dirty Dora, and your family tree was planted by Captain Kidd. You're a cross between a pickpocket and a pole-cat, and as far as I'm concerned you're like something that never was nor never will be.

"I'm through with you. *Sabe?* From this time on, don't cross my path or nod. Cherish my wife and baby until I can hew a place in the world for them to come to, but to you I am as dead."

Well, Hank, I just landed here in Helena, and you ought to feel proud that I wrote to you right away. Write soon, and believe

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me, it's got to be bad writing if I can't stand for it in a letter.

Truly and sincerely yours,
DOBIE DALTON, Gen. Del.
Helena, Aug. 1.

P. S. Remember what I said above about talking back to my uncle by marriage? I said to him, "To you I am as dead." Well, Hank, that sucker ain't got no imagination. He can't imagine anything being dead—you know what I mean?

I got to the picket fence ahead of him, and I sure jumped high, but I reckon I left the ground too soon, because I came down on top of the fence and ran a picket right up one leg of my chaps. I remembers hearing uncle by marriage say, "Not only to me, but to every one else," and then I don't know anything until I woke up in the Palace Saloon, with the boys trying to find out why my leg won't bend. I look pretty good out of my eyes and expect to be O. K. very soon.

I went to a lawyer and told him all about it. I told him what I said about me being as dead to uncle, and he says: "That was just a figure of speech, of course, but maybe your uncle was afraid you wouldn't keep your word. What do you want me to do anyhow?"

I says, "You can't hang him, can you?" and he says, "No," and I says, "No chance for a life sentence?" and he says, "No," and I says, "Well, let him to go to —— as far as I'm concerned."

Well, Hank, of all the nerve you ever seen, that lawyer had it. He wanted me to pay him five dollars for advice. I says to him: "If you think I'm going to pay you two-fifty for each time you said, 'No,' you're loco. I'm the only one what suggested anything, and you ought to pay me."

Hank, take my advice and keep away from lawyers. They ain't what they're cracked up to be, and if they don't get paid they get sore, and this one ought to be fighting for a living instead of lawying, believe me.

Yours,
DOBIE.

DEAR HANK: Well, Hank, I got your letter this morning, and I want to tell you right now that I ain't Mister Dalton. Have you forgot my first name? My gosh, the Circle C must be hard up for paper if that's all they had. I didn't ask for no telegram, Hank.

You say to me: "Go to ——! Can you read that plain?"

Sure I can read it, Hank, but that ain't nothing to say to a friend. I ain't scared of no hereafter, and after I'm dead she all looks alike to me. I ain't even hinted about your ignorance, Hank, and you read that wrong. There are things I know which I wouldn't say to nobody's face, even if I knowed them like I do you.

I also want to tell you that you never seen the day in which you could bust me in the nose, unless you sneaked up on me in the dark. As far as Emmeline is concerned, Hank, I know my own business better than you do. Maybe you're stuck on my wife, eh? You seem to be interested a lot, but you ain't never been married and don't know any better.

I agree with you when you say I must be some father for any child. It's fine, believe me, but it's like I heard a feller say once, "There's a Divinity which shapes our ends," and I could tell him about a family which sure has spoiled the shape of anything this here Divinity ever done for me, and their name is Galesburg.

Honest, I never said you was ignorant, but if you keep on writing like the last one, Hank, I'm going to form a opinion of my own. Any time you want to call me something what you can't spell—get a dictionary, and don't make a lot of fool marks that nobody knows what they are.

Well, Hank old friend, I've got a surprize for you. Now, I don't want you to tell everybody about this, and brag that you knowed me when I was a common, ordinary puncher like you are, but just keep still about it. You remember Pete Huddleson, who used to punch cows for the Lazy Y? Well, I meets Pete, and we has a regular wau-wau. I showed him your letter and he says:

"Hank never will amount to nothing like me and you. He ain't educated and not naturally bright."

I guess you must know him well, because he sure knows you all over. Nice feller. I asked him what he was doing for a living, and he says, "Why, I'm a cow detective."

What do you know about that, Hank? Some jump in the world, eh? Well, I told him I had figured on something like that, and he says, "Why don't you use your

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talents in protecting the cows, on account of there being a awful wave of crime sweeping over us?" He said I ought to quit paying the saloon rents, and be a man among menkind.

Well, he took me up to a office and introduces me to a feller, who looks me over and says, "What have we here?"

"He wants to be a detective," says Pete.

"Oh!" says the feller. "Why are you sore at the cows?"

I says: "I ain't sore at nothing. Why think I'm sore at the cows?"

"Well," says he, "there must be some reason for wanting to do them dirt."

"I want to be a great help to them," says I, and he says, "Go East, young man, and give them a chance."

Pete wants me to get the job pretty bad, so he says, "Say, Sam, this feller might make a lot for us on commission."

The feller looks through some books, and then says:

"Maybe he can. Do you know any place where you can catch a lot of rustlers all at once? Cow detectives don't get a regular salary, you understand. We pay a hundred dollars per head for all rustlers in good condition."

Hank, I never figured on hunting thieves on commission, but that's the way they work. Hundred per head ain't so bad. Figuring two or three per month, makes a fair salary, eh? You're danged right she does.

"Well," says I, "give me a star and a gun, and watch me land 'em."

"You'll have to buy a gun and a star from us," says the feller. "I've got a extra gun you can have for fifteen dollars."

"I've got a second-hand star for six," says Pete.

"Well," says I, "it must be the North Star or the Evening Star to be worth that much, and as far as the gun is concerned, at fifteen dollars, I will use a club on them."

Pete hunts up this star and hands it to me, and tells me it's special. It was a star, but there ain't no writing on it at all, and I tells Pete I'd be sort of a blank officer with a star like that.

"My gosh!" says he. "How far do you reckon you'd get with a star that said 'Detective' on it? Detectives don't want folks to know their business. *Sabe?*"

Of course I knowed that, Hank, but I didn't want to mention it at first. When you pins me right down to it I know quite a lot about mostly anything you can mention, and I know lots of things that nobody ever seen in a book by practical experience.

The feller shakes hands with me, and he says:

"The secret of being a detective is this: Buy a gun and a star, a ticket to Brazil, and don't monkey with other folks' business."

"Do you want to send me to Brazil?" I asks, but he says, "No, I reckon not, because they're exporting, not importing."

I says, "Is that a figure of speech?" and he says, "I reckon so."

Hank, some folks talk like fools to me, but in them cases I let sleeping dogs lie. Me and Pete went down-stairs and h'isted a few, and Pete tells me that he wants me to take time by the fetlock and show folks what I can do.

Hank, you can just think of the word "rustler" and into your brain comes the thought that you know where there is plenty of them, but when you get to wondering where they are, you can't put your thumb on a single one. Here I've paid twenty-one dollars for utensils of the trade, and I can't think of a single customer.

"Maybe you can frame somebody," says Pete, and I says, "I ain't in no picture business," and Pete says: "That's a figure of speech, and means that it ain't always the guilty which suffers the most. We ain't looking for no died-in-the-woolen thieves. All you've got to do is to make the evidence strong enough and nobody cares. Here is your chance to get even with them what has sinned against you."

"I hate my uncle by marriage," says I, and Pete says, "There you are."

"Yes," says I, "there I ain't. He ain't fit for nobody to associate with and maybe he's expecting me back."

"He won't know you," says Pete. "Detectives always go disguised."

Hank, I knew all about disguises, but I wanted him to mention it first.

I says: "That's all right, Pete, but what kind of a disguise will I take upon me? I'm knowed far and wide by my face and figure, and I sure don't want folks to call me by my first name when I show up."

He asks me how much money I've got left; so I tells him, and then he leads me down the street. He says, "We'll let Fate decide, Dobie."

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Hank, if I was you I'd never let Fate decide anything for me. Flip a coin, cut cards or do anything where you've got a even break. We stops in front of a store, and Pete tells me they have everything we want.

"The idea is to get a disguise that don't attract attention," says he. "What is the most plentiful around your home town?"

"Dogs," says I, and he says: "Use your own judgment, Dobie, but I can tell you right now that your hind legs don't bend the right way. Is there many Injuns around there?"

I says there is, and he says: "There you are. Can you talk Injun?"

"No," says I, "but that don't matter, because nobody except the Injuns can, and if any Injun doubts my word I'll run him ragged."

I can do it, too, Hank. I often wonder why a man like Daniel Crockett wanted to pack a gun for, when he could likely have knocked them upside down with his hands.

Well, Hank, they didn't have just what I wanted, but it ain't what we want in this world, but what we get, as the sheriff said to the horse-thief. I sure got some great stuff. The feller said I was getting a bargain in history stuff, and I guess I did. I got Geronimo's war-bonnet, Sitting Bull's shirt, Chief Joseph's moccasins, and a pair of beaded pants, which the feller said belonged to Pokyhontas. They're all heirlooms.

The feller wanted to sell me a squirrel-rifle, but I told him I was out for bigger game, and he said I ought to get a scatter-gun, so I could kill a hundred at a shot.

I said, "I never seen that many squirrels in one flock in my life," and he said, "You sure have been lucky, but if I was you I'd look out."

Hank, city folks made me laugh. I've been bred and born in the open, and ought to feel sorry for them, I suppose, but I couldn't help saying, "If you knowed anything about natural history you'd know that squirrels are harmless," and he says, "They've got to eat, ain't they?"

Wasn't that a foolish answer, Hank? I sold my own clothes to him for fifteen dollars, which hadn't been worn out much. Pete wanted me to pay him six dollars for that star, but I wouldn't; so we made a contract, in which I'm to give him ten per cent. on all the outlaws I caught in the first six months. Pete thinks he's smart, but I'll show him. I figure to hold off on the bounty for the first six months and then cash in strong. Well, Hank, there ain't nothing worth reading, so will close, hoping to hear from you soon.

I hope the next time you write it will be with a pure heart and not full of sarcasm. You're a old friend of mine and I think of you more in sorrow than in anger, because you can't help being what you are, and I don't expect it.

Yours resp'y as ever,
DOBIE DALTON, Helena, Aug. 10.

P. S. Hank, I had a funny experience when I went to the hotel to get my war-bag. I went in the back way and was just trying to get into my room when a feller steps up to me and says, "What's the idea?"

I says to him, "Who are you?" and he says, "The house detective," and I says, "My gosh, are the buildings mixed up in this fearful wave of crime?"

He says, "You're too smart for a Injun," and I says, "Yes, and for any house detective."

Hank, my room is on the second floor. You go down about thirty steps, turn to the right and go down about thirty more. I think we missed the first thirty, and then bounced over the railing to the lower floor. There was a lot of folks setting around in them plush chairs, but they takes one look at a Injun chief going high and handsome with a paleface, and then they just kind of faded out. One fat feller hit a big window dead center, and opened up one whole side of the place. I picked up my opponent and throwed him over the counter, where he lit on the clerk's head, who was hiding.

I stops to get my wind, and then the clerk pokes his head over the edge of the counter, and he says to me, "Do you wish to check out?" I says, "I ain't the kind of a whip-poorwill that wastes valuable time in wishing, but I'll be polite enough to wish thee a fond fare-thee-well."

I starts out and he says, "Don't you want your Bill?" and I says, "I didn't know his name was Bill, but if it is let him go as he lays, because I can't use him any more."

Pete got me out of jail, and says I ought to pay him something for showing up at the right time, but his watch must have been slow, because the right time would have

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been just before them seventeen policemen hit me all to once.

Them wolves of the law sure patted me on the head, Hank, and if I wasn't a wonderful constitution you would be putting flowers on my alabaster brow before this. I sure stood a lot of petting on the head.

Pete is a old fox. He told the judge that I wasn't all there in the head, but he would see that I left town right away. He took me up to his room and fixed my head, where I am now.

Don't tell anybody that I'm a detective, Hank, because they'll find it out sooner or later. You can't hide my light under a bushel, Hank, because I'm a shiner.

Yours for the law,

DOBIE.

DEAR HANK:

I take my pen in hand and stare at your letter. I wonder if you have been crossed in love or something. You act like somebody which has been accused of stealing a cow and ain't got no alias.

Hank, if you're in trouble confide in me and I'll advise you what to do. I won't advise you wrong if I know what's right, and I've got the law behind me in all my advising and it's cheap.

You better get a dictionary, Hank, and find out things. You say I should have used the word "asphalt" instead of alabaster, in speaking of my brow. I looked it up, Hank, and I know you're wrong. Asphalt is black, while alabaster is white. Didn't you mean concrete? Likely you did.

You say that Pete made a fool out of me, but you know that can't be done, and you say that you don't dare to tell me what you want to in a letter, on account of the government. What has Uncle Sam got to do with secrets between me and you, as long as we ain't moonshining or smuggling?

Maybe you've done something awful and are afraid to tell me by letter. If you have, Hank, you can lay it all at the feet of ignorance. If I had hold of you for a while I'd sure wise you up for your own safety. This world is filled with pitfalls for the ignorant. You say that anybody'd know I wasn't a Injun. Ha, ha, ha. You're showing ignorance, Hank.

I walked the last fifteen miles into Mesquite, just because I fooled a man with my disguise. I was riding on top of a box-car, and a brakeman came along and seen me. He says to me, "You're going to enjoy this," and I says, "Siax mux wux hoodledoo," which sounds like a pleasant reply in some language.

I don't know what it means, Hank, but maybe he did, because he gets sore. The train is going along fast, and the brakeman has a big club and two big feet.

He says to me, "Injun, you better hang on to your religion, because my great-great-grandfather was scalped by Injuns, and I've hated them ever since."

Hank, as indifferent to pain as I am I will never look upon barb wire with compassion again. I bounced twice after I lit, and the last bounce left me in a barb-wire fence, where I had to leave some of my Pokyhontas' pants and a lot of flesh and blood.

I had the satisfaction of knowing that I fooled the brakeman on my nationality and also that I jumped ahead of his kick. A couple of ordinary punchers comes riding along, and one of them says, "That's the first time I ever seen a blond Injun hung up to dry."

Believe me, Hank, it takes some Injun disguise to get past with if you've got blond hair, eh? You know where I told them to go, Hank, but they likely won't go. Cowpunchers are ornery hounds, Hank, and you ought to quit it.

Well, I got to Mesquite intact. Likely you don't know what that word means, so I will say I got all of me there without making two trips.

Hank, I felt right at home here. I figured there ought to be some mail for me; so I went to the post-office. I went right up and looked the postmaster in his eye.

"Well," says he, "what do you want?"

Hank, I thinks awful quick in a emergency, and I remembers my disguise.

"You catchum mail for Pokyhontas?" I asks.

Sam McAllister is the postmaster, Hank, and I'll bet a broom could knock his eyes off. He looks at me for a minute and then says—

"Are you the one what saved John Smith?"

I says: "Maybe I am. I've knowed so many Smiths in my life that saving one or two don't make me remember nothing."

"Nothing for Pokyhontas," says he, and, Hank, just then in comes my loving wife Emmeline and my uncle by marriage and they're packing my son and heir. Sam McAllister makes a lot of fuss over the kid,

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and you would too, Hank, because he sure looks like me in every way.

"There ain't no doubt about him being a Galesburg," says McAllister, and my uncle by marriage says: "He sure is. Everybody says he looks just like me," which is a darn lie, Hank. Then my uncle by marriage asks if there's any mail, and McAllister says: "A letter for Dobie Dalton. You want that?" and he says, "No, we sure don't, because it must be somebody asking him to pay back borrowed money."

Ain't that a nice way to act, Hank? When a dog is down they all kick him. You know how I felt, standing there in reach of my loving wife and son and heir, and I can't touch them on account of me being a detective in disguise. I wanted to get a look at my own flesh and blood; so I slips over and peeks over my loving wife's shoulder.

Well, Hank, there ain't nothing much ever happens around here. This place is deader than a skinned snake and folks are clannish and cold. Anyway, I got a good look at my own little son, and he's worth it, you bet. In a way, I can't blame my uncle by marriage, after thinking it over, because I wouldn't want no Injuns peeking over my wife's shoulder and feasting their eyes upon my kid.

If you don't think my Injun disguise was good, Hank, you ought to have seen me light on my hands and knees out in the street. I got up and looked back, but decided that if I went back and licked him I'd get a lot of notoriety from licking my uncle by marriage, and my secret would be made public.

I went on across the street and into a saloon. I leans up against the bar, and says to the bartender, "Whusky." I could have said whisky, but when you're a Injun you've got to talk broken. The bartender comes around in front of the bar and walks up to me.

Hank, he was a man of low degree like a sidewinder, and I hope to die if I ever forgive him. He got up close and says, "You think you're cute, don't you?" and I says, "I know I am," and he says: "No U. S. marshal will ever convict me of selling booze to a Injun by a stool-pigeon like you. This is one job you fall down on."

I says, "I never fall down from a *hombre* like you."

Hank, I don't know what a stool-pigeon is, and I don't want to know, but it must be something awful. That bartender hit me just like I'd done him a lot of dirt. Some folks ain't got sense enough to know when to quit. I've licked a lot of fellers in my time, but I always mixed mercy with my ferociousness, and quit when they had enough, but this bartender was vulgar in his actions and only quit when he got tired.

Hank, you will say, "Why didn't you go back and knock his head off?" I'll tell you why. A feller like me lowers himself when he licks bartenders. Folks would say, "The poor bartender," and so forth, and I'd get no credit for my hard work. Anyway, a detective can't mix with folks like that and keep his dignity, and dignity is a asset with detectives.

Well, I told a feller about it—about me falling down on the job, and he says, "That's just a figure of speech," and I says, "I don't like them kind of figures, because they mean trouble every time I hear one."

Well, as I said before, Hank, there ain't nothing worth writing. I got up and went around to the shady side of Sellers' Hotel, and set down to plot a little and repair my shirt and war-bonnet.

Pretty soon a feller drifts out on the porch and looks at me. He's a political-looking person, with one of them tall hats and a fancy vest.

He comes over by me, looks me over and says, "You *sabe* English?"

I shakes my head and he says, "What do you speak?" and I says, "Kickapoo," and he says, "Fluently?" and I says, "I can get along."

He grins and sets down with me. He says: "Me and you are going to do business. You ain't busy, are you?"

I says, "Now, you keep your distance and talk, because I've been riled and I'm liable to bust loose any old time," and he says, "Bust loose if you feel that way, because I used to be heavyweight champ of the Pacific Coast," and I says, "There ain't no use of us having trouble right away."

There's no use in starting things, Hank, when they can be avoided. He tells me that we're going to do some business, and we're both going to get rich. He takes me around to the street and shows me some circus-poster things which orates that Chief Howling Wolf, of the Dogrib tribe, the greatest medicine-man on earth, is to

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appear for two nights, and will let suffering humanity buy some of his Alaskan Alleviator, which will cure anything from Nome to New York. The chief is under the direction of Professor Diogenes Mc Gillcuddy, who discovered the wonderful healer.

I looks it all over and then I says, "I need it all right, but I ain't got the price of a bottle of water."

He says to me: "You've got it all wrong. You are to be Chief Howling Wolf."

Hank, I didn't know what to say, so I says, "How do you make that out?"

"Well," says he, "I had a half-breed Siwash playing the part, but he got sick."

I says, "Why didn't he take some of the Alleviator?"

He stares at me, and then says: "My gosh! Me and you are going to make a lot of money. You know it will cure anything, don't you?"

"It says it will cure in from ten minutes to ten hours," says I, "but where do I get rich on it?"

"You get a royalty on each bottle I sell. For every bottle I sell, you get five cents, and all you've got to do is sing a Injun song, do a war-dance and act like you was in a trance. Maybe you'll have to make a speech in your own tongue. You've got a cinch."

Well, Hank, I hired out to him, and then we went up to his room at the hotel. We sat down and then he says to me: "You had me fooled for a while but I know you ain't a Injun. Why do you wear those clothes?"

I says to him, "Now that me and you are pardners, I'll tell you. I'm a detective."

Hank, it takes all kinds of folks to make a world, and some of them has queer notions. This feller tells me later on that he was born with a hatred for the name of detective, and when he hears it he busts loose and hurts somebody. I'm sorry I spoke so quick, but it's all in a lifetime.

Old Man Sellers comes up to see what the noise was all about, and the professor paid him for the busted furniture, and told him that the chief was in a trance and wasn't responsible. McGillcuddy is French, and the French think quick like I do. He painted my face with horse liniment, so it won't show so much, but the feeling is there.

Hank, I'll say again that I think something must be wrong with you. If you need any advice you can write me at Miles City and address me as Howling Wolf, the wonderful medicine-man from Alaska. If you're sick, Hank, I'll see if I can get you a price on a bottle of Alleviator.

Yours for suffering humanity,
CHIEF HOWLING WOLF, Dogrib.
Mesquite, Aug. 16.

P. S. We are only going to show here one night instead of two. The professor is going to slip one over on the city marshal. He tells me that the marshal made him contract to show here two nights, and he'll arrest us if we don't hold to it, but we got it all fixed. It's all right, Hank, because he ain't got no moral right to hold us, and anyway, Bill Jackson is the marshal and he used to be just a ordinary puncher like you, and you'd look well trying to make us show two nights, wouldn't you, Hank?

H. W. D.

DEAR HANK:

If you wrote to me at Miles City I never got it, and it will likely go to the dead-letter office and neither of us will ever see it again, but if you ain't wrote yet, Hank, don't do it, because I ain't there. This old town always did have a hold on me, which is natural, being as my darling wife and son and heir lives here. They are both well and send you their regards, as far as I know.

Well, Hank, I've been a actor. What do you think the boys of the old outfit will say when you say, "Boys, my old bunkie is a actor?" It's a fact, Hank. The show was free, gratis for nothing, and almost every seat was taken. Me and the professor piles all the bottles on a big table, and gets everything ready.

Hank, did I tell you we had two hired men with us? Well, we've got two niggers, who ain't niggers, but white men. One of them sings and the other sings and plays the banjo. We use them to sing sad songs so folks will feel sick and buy more Alleviator.

I sets on a blanket in the middle of the stage, with the professor back of the table and a nigger on each corner of the stage. The professor has diamonds as big as marbles, Hank, and he's some moneyed man, believe me. Well, the curtain goes up and the feller with the banjo thumps away until he gets tired, and then the professor steps up and says:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to gaze upon the last living member of the

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famous Dogrib tribe of the wilds of Alaska, which I brought at enormous expense to compound herbs and barks which will cure any and all the ills of menkind.

"Before me sits Chief Howling Wolf, medicine-man of the Dogribs, who brought his entire tribe of twenty thousand souls through pestilence, flood and blizzard without losing a single soul, and all he used was the marvelous Alleviator. Without losing a single soul—a single soul, mind you! Upon that table is enough of this wonderful mixture to cure every ill in your city.

"Ladies and gents, the Alleviator is beyond price. It should only be within the grasp of the most wealthy, but the chief refused to compound the mixture until I signed an agreement to sell it within the reach of all. Now, before I have my gifted Tennessee minstrels pass among you, selling the Alleviator at the unheard-of price of one dollar per bottle, I will prove my assertions by having the chief do the Dance of the Blizzard, only danced by the Dogribs."

Hank, of course my uncle by marriage has to stand up in the audience and say: "One moment, professor. You state that the chief is the last of his tribe, and again you say he saved the whole tribe of twenty thousand. What happened to them?"

Hank, that sucker makes me mad, so I stands right up and says, "They all died since I left, you —— fool!"

Naturally everybody applauds. They appreciated it a lot, but the professor and them two minstrels hopped upon me, sat upon me and so forth. I hears the professor saying:

"Ladies and gents, I apologize for the chief's remarks, although it ain't necessary after I explains to you that the chief is mostly always in a trance, and while he can't speak a word of English, he will speak some one else's thoughts. He's a mental telegrapher."

Wasn't it cute, Hank? He sure lied quick, and they believed him.

"You can't speak a word of English, can you, chief?" asks the professor and I shakes my head, which wasn't any lie, being as one of them alleged niggers had kicked me in the mouth.

Hank, I danced that Blizzard thing, and it was good, too. The crowd whooped for more. One feller cried tears. It was kind of sad, at that, Hank. Seemed like everybody bought a bottle of the Alleviator.

There was a lot of ordinary punchers there, Hank, and they acted just like they usually do. I wonder that you stick at the punching job, Hank, but I guess it's about all you're fit for.

I was singing my Injun song, and it was a darn good song, even if I did make it up as I went along, and all to once something squashed right into my face. Another hit me lower down and I seen it's eggs. The next one must have been tossed high, because I caught it as it came down. Hank, I'm all out of practise, but at that I hit my uncle by marriage in the face.

Just then somebody took a shot at the banjo, and it made me mad. To think that a lot of low-down punchers would so far forget themselves as to do that. I steps over to the table, picks up a bottle of Alleviator and I sure crowned somebody.

The professor yelped at me to quit, but I told him to go to ——, because I can't understand English, and went on bombarding. The audience got into the spirit of the thing, and our Alleviator began to come back to us. I sure would have had that bunch stampeded, but them low-down punchers began to shoot the bottles off the table, and when the enemy shoots into your ammunition supply you've got to quit.

I never seen hide nor hair of them minstrels after the first shot. Well, Hank, being a actor has its joys and sorrows the same as plumbing or milking cows, but it's care-free just the same.

Me and the professor crawled out of the back door, and gets met by my uncle by marriage. I don't know who he is until he gets through hanging the professor over a hitch-rack, and then he says, "I'll learn you to hit me with an egg!"

See the funny side of it, Hank? I sure had to laugh, and I busts right out. He says, "What are you laughing about?" and I says, "You —— fool, it was me who hit you."

Well, Hank, when I woke up I was doubled up in an old plaster barrel, and the professor was crawling around on his hands and knees. I says to him, "Did you lose something?" and he says, "No, I'm just looking for the hole which the dynamite made when it exploded."

I fell out of the barrel and shook myself together. The professor leans against the hitch-rack and groans a few times, and says, "You sure put that show on the rocks, feller."

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I says, "We won't argue the right or wrong of it, but let's get us both a dose of the Alleviator and pull our freight."

He says, "You poor darned fool," which shows that he felt sorry for me, and then he says, "Well, it's a cinch we won't show here no more," and I says: "They'll have to beg a lot on bended knee to buy a drop of Alleviator from me. Are we going to do what we planned?"

He says, "Yes; you get hold of the marshal and hang on to him until I yell for you, and then we'll show this town what is what."

The idea was for me to kidnap the marshal until the professor can get ready to leave.

Well, Hank, my fingers are getting tired from holding this pen, and there ain't no news worth writing about. I suppose you are still polishing a saddle and going without a shave like all punchers do. Funny that you stay there, but it ain't so funny when you consider that you couldn't do anything else. Hank, if you was put up against the things which have confronted me, you'd fall flat and throw up your hands.

It takes brains to be a detective or a actor, and you'd never be either. I don't like to ask anybody for a dollar, Hank, and I'm too proud to do it, but right now a dollar would look bigger than Dancing Prairie. I was to get five cents for every bottle that was sold, but I never got a cent, and I never heard the professor yell.

If you need any advice, Hank, you could send a five-dollar bill in the letter along with them questions, and I'd answer them for nothing, but I know you ain't the kind of a pelican to ask for something for nothing; so I'd keep the bill without hurting your feelings.

If you went to any other detective, Hank, he'd charge you that much for one question, while I give personal attention to each and every one.

Hoping to get your questions very soon, I remain as ever,

Yours resp'y and truly,
DOBIE DALTON,
Mesquite, Aug. 20.

P. S. I'm using my own name again, being as I'm no longer Howling Wolf, and I ain't got no Injun clothes for a disguise nor anything else worth wearing. I suppose the professor is sore as a boil to lose his main actor, but I ain't to blame as you can see. I never throw nobody down, Hank, and I'm strictly upright.

I found the marshal standing in front of the Jewel Saloon. I rushes up to him and says, "Officer, there's a dead man down the street."

He says, "What's the matter with him?" and I says, "Cramps, I guess."

The marshal grabs hold of me and tries to yank me around into the light to see who I am; so I pats him on the head with my six-shooter. It won't do for him to see me or they'll hold the show for another night; so I caresses him once and then packed him down the street, where I put him under the sidewalk. Then I got to yelling and shooting, just like the professor told me to do, to attract attention down that way, and believe me, it sure did start things moving.

The whole town comes down there, and they wants to know what it's all about. I'm listening for the professor's yell when somebody says, "It's that fake Injun who throwed them bottles!"

Hank, I got a string of about twenty punchers around my neck in a second. I measure six feet in my socks, but when I woke up I'm so short I don't know whether I've got bunions or a headache. They sure roosted upon me.

Well, Hank, there ain't a thing they can do to me. A lawyer came in to see me today, and the sheriff let him stay five minutes.

I said to him, "It's a shame and a disgrace to do this to me, and I don't know anything about anything," and he says: "You talk too much. If you don't keep your mouth shut you won't have a foot to stand upon."

I says, "My gosh, are them savages going to amputate my feet?"

He says, "That's just a figure of speech," and I says: "Good-by, feet! I know something about figures of speech, and I'll likely get a judge with the same ideas that my uncle by marriage has—also the bartender; but you tell them for me that they'll know they've been to a party if they start anything, believe me. I'll make them go a plenty before they cut Dobie Dalton loose from his boot-holders."

Well, Hank, there ain't no news. Hope you will ask those questions and are too proud to want them answered for nothing.

Yours,
DOBIE.

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MR. HENRY PECK:

Well, Hank, I must say I got your letter, for which I am ashamed of myself for reading same. I looked all through it, and it wouldn't be a sensible letter for even my son and heir to write. You act like a little kid which has had their candy stole.

Just to show your ignorance, you say you wouldn't even ask me the time of day and expect to get a intelligent answer. I've got one of the best watches ever made, and you know it. Have I ever lied to you when you asked me what time it was? Answer—No; and you know it, too, Hank.

Of course you know your own business better than I do, which I doubt, but I'll concede that much to you, but you're crazy when you say you wouldn't pay five dollars for my brains if they'd hand them to you on a gold platter, and throw the platter in. Hank, did you ever price a gold platter? You never did or you wouldn't talk that way, which shows ignorance.

I often wonder if you ain't a little bit loco from listening to the cows bawling all the time. Try stuffing a little cotton in your ears, which advice I give you for nothing such as it is.

You don't know what a detective has to do, because you say that if anybody misses any cows out here you'll know who stole them. I get you, Hank. You think you're a mind-reader, eh? You'll find that you can't do much like that, because outlaws are smart, you bet.

Well, Hank, the court set yesterday, which means that the judge was there to listen to you lie about everything, but I didn't have to lie, because I hadn't done nothing in the first place. I took the sheriff with me to the court-house.

The judge asked me if I was represented by counsel, which means the same as asking if I've got a lawyer, and I told him I didn't because my arrest is a farce, and I ain't paying no law-shark to get me loose from something I ain't been tangled in, and he don't say nothing, because he knows I'm right.

Then he says, "Call the case of the State *versus* Dobie Dalton, *alias* Howling Wolf," and I says, "For gosh sake, judge, is the whole State against me in this?"

The judge makes the sheriff go to the back of the room and throw three fellows outside, and I said, "Why didn't you send me?"

The lawyer says, "You've got troubles enough, ain't you?" I reckon he felt sorry for me, Hank, but I don't need no legal sorrow.

Well, Hank, old Abner Blalock, who owns the bank, gets up on the stand and talks like this:

"Last Tuesday night I had been to the medicine show and was going home. I heard a lot of shooting and yelling going on down the street; so I started to go down there. I'm almost in front of the bank, when there came a big explosion and the whole front of the bank fell out.

"I ran back and found three men, two colored men and the other was the medicine professor. I heard him yell, 'You danged fool, you used too much juice!' Just about that time one of the colored men hit me, and that's all I know, except that they didn't get any money."

Hank, that was a awful blow to me and I reeled in my chair. Then the marshal gets up in the chair and tells the judge that I hit him over the head after trying to entice him down the street. That's about all he had to say, and then the judge asks me to tell what I know. I says:

"What the marshal just told you is a lie on the face of it. He says he seen who I was, and that's a lie, because I wasn't in the light where he could see my face. I don't know anything about the robbery. I found the marshal crawling around the street. I started shooting and yelling, and then I happens to think that if the crowd comes milling down there they might step on him; so I shoved him under the sidewalk. I asks damages from them what walked over me, and I wish now that I had left that lying officer to his fate and took care of my own. Amen."

One feller choked over his chew, and they had to take him outside. The judge gets sort of overcome, too. The prosecuting attorney walks up and down the floor, and then he looks at the judge, who shakes his head. Hank, I sure had 'em all guessing.

Then the judge calls, "Gabriel Galesburg," and my uncle by marriage comes up and holds up his right hand. Hank, there's more liars in the court-house than there is in your cow-outfit, which is quite a few.

The judge says, "In your opinion, has Dobie Dalton brains enough to be accessory to a bank-robbery?"

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My uncle by marriage says, "Judge, he ain't got brains enough to be an accessory to anything."

"Do you recognize the defendant?" asks the judge, and my uncle by marriage says: "His face had been altered quite a lot, but his actions prove he's nobody on earth but Dobie Dalton. He's likely been made the goat in this proceedings."

The judge and his friends all seem to get their heads together, and then he asks me to take the stand.

"Dobie Dalton," says he, "the court has decided to be lenient. I am going to give you five years in the penitentiary at Deer Lodge, and make it a suspender sentence."

Hank, when the enormity of the offense strikes me, I stands up and says:

"Why, you danged old billy-goat-faced alleged lawyer, I'll show you where to head in at. Any old time I make suspenders in Deer Lodge for five years, it will be a cold day. You can't hand Dobie Dalton anything like that."

Hank, I moved quick. The sheriff reached for me, but I kicked his feet out from under him, and then I picked up a ink-bottle and whaled away at the judge. If the judge had held still it would all been right, but he had to duck his head, and the bottle hit my uncle my marriage between the eyes. Hank, I went through that crowd like a stampeding cow and raged down the steps and away I went.

Nothing can stop me when I make up my mind to go ahead, because I've got will-power wrote all over my face. I know there ain't no use trying to get away on foot, so I lopes down to a hitch-rack, where there's a lot of broncs tied. I says to myself, "You'll likely get caught and have to make a few extra suspenders, but after five years it won't make much difference." I grabs a pinto and hops into the saddle.

Hank, I'm a fine judge of human nature, and I can look a man in the face and tell what he is, but I guess I'm out of practise with broncs. This one looks meek and mild, but he lied in the face. That don't make much difference if you know a horse has the bucking idea, but when you don't it's like misplaced confidence. I don't mind a bronc pitching a little, if I'm looking for it, but I was thinking more about speed than height, and I missed the right stirrup and while I'm trying to find it I loses the other one.

Hank, as good a detective as I am, I can't find either of them stirrups, and after while I thinks, "What's the use of hunting?" and I seems to leave everything behind.

Hank, do you believe in hunches? I have a lot of them, some of which I don't use, but this time I got a good usable one. When I got the wind back into my diafram, which is my lungs, I looks around. Know where I am, Hank? I'm in Gabe Galesburg's front yard, with the dog barking in my face.

I look at the house and says, "Dobie, it appears that you must go into the house and see your loving wife and son and heir."

Hank, you know that nothing stops me when I get a idea, so I walks right up to that house without knocking, and goes inside. There's a strange woman in there, and I says to her, "Where is my loving wife?"

She says, "I don't know," and just then I hears my son and heir bawling, and I says to her: "Woman, you are keeping something away from me. Emmeline is under a bad influence, and she can do as she likes, but nobody is ever going to keep me away from my kid. You folks think you are smart, but I'm here to tell you that a man has as much right to have a kid as any woman, and I shudder to even think that my son and heir is to be raised up in a home like this."

Hank, I know how to talk to them, eh? That woman just stands there and stares at me, and I says, "You just watch me get him," and I went right in and got my kid and walked out to the front room.

I says, "This kid belongs to me, woman, and wo unto the human being mortal who gets into my path."

"Papa?" asks the kid, and I says, "You're —— right it is, old-timer."

Pretty good for a two-months-old kid, eh, Hank? Blood will tell every old time, and the Daltons are early talkers.

I starts out of the door, and something seems to burst in my head. At first I think it's a blood-vessel, but when I comes to a little I finds a piece of it in my lap and I know it was that marble statue that Emmeline liked so well. The woman is standing on the steps holding the kid by the hand, and that kid is bawling to beat ——, and it ain't my kid at all, Hank, because it's got red hair and freckles, and she calls it Sam.

She says to me, "You ought to be ashamed," and I says, "You're the first

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woman who ever hit me with a nude statue, and you ought to be ashamed with me."

I got up and felt of my head, and then I says to her, "You don't need to be scared, ma'am, because I ain't going to swipe that homely little bunch of freckles and red hair," and then I started for the gate.

Hank, I'll never soothe a woman's fears again. They ain't got no sense of right or wrong. I ain't took twelve steps when she hits me in the back of the head with half of that statue, and I drove my nose in a geranium-bed.

I got up after while and starts for the gate, when I meets a stranger. He says to me, "Holy smoke, what happened to you?"

I says, "Let me give you some advice. Don't go near that house. There's a woman up there who owns a red-headed kid, and she's a cross between a bobcat and a buzz-saw. She ain't got principle nor nothing."

Well, Hank, I'm all through giving advice, if you know what that means. If you wrote to me and enclosed a million silver dollars and offered it to me if I would tell you the time, I'd tell you to take your money and go where it is hot.

Well, Hank, I don't know when you will hear from me again. I'm getting tired of the long Winter and long for a sunny clime. I feel that you are still my friend, Hank, and I subscribe myself the same as I mostly always do, as yours sincerely and truly,

DOBIE DALTON,

Mesquite, Aug. 30.

P. S. Unless something happens I am going away from here, Hank. After I left Gabe Galesburg's home, I wanders down-town. I don't care if they send me up for life, but I figure nobody will know me now.

Then I meets my uncle by marriage. He's got a lump where that ink-bottle hit him, but he don't mention it, which is a mark of respect to him.

He looks at me, and then he says, "My ——, Dobie, you're a puzzle."

I says, "I can sure keep them guessing," and he says, "Why Emmeline wants to hang on to you is a puzzle to me, but nobody understands women."

I says, "What do you want to know about them?"

He looks at me and shakes his head, and then he says, "How would you like to go to Los Angeles?"

I says, "Is that a figure of speech?" He says, "No," and I says, "What's the joke?" He says, "Emmeline," and then he takes me down to the depot and shows me a carload of furniture, and tells me to get in.

"Now," says he, "you are welcome to ride to Los Angeles in there, but it won't break my heart if you fall off on the way."

I says to him, "Can I go and kiss my wife and son and heir before I go?"

"No, it can't be done," says he, and I says to him, "You can go to ——, and that ain't no figure of speech."

That would be inhuman, Hank. I'd as soon think of going to China without kissing my relatives by marriage; so I walked back up-town. Hank, I wish I wasn't so badly attached to my family, because if I was one of them selfish brutes without bowels of compassion I'd be riding along fine and dandy, instead of being here without no one to love me, a suspender sentence on my head and no money in pocket.

They took away my star and gun, which means I'm no detective in appearance; but I ain't mad, Hank. If you don't hear from me in Los Angeles you'll know I never got there or forgot to write.

Yours privately,

DOBIE DALTON, Citizen.

P. S. I forgot to tell you that after I went back up-town I drifts into a saloon, and I says to the bartender, "Do you know Gabe Galesburg?"

"Sure," says he. "He left for Los Angeles today," and I says, "What for?"

"To live, I reckon. His wife and their niece left yesterday, but he had to stay and ship his furniture."

Can you beat that, Hank? I says, "What did he do with his home?"

"Sold it to Bill Gallagher," says he, and I says, "Has Gallagher got any kids?" He says, "One little red-headed one."

I says, "Who is this Gallagher person?" and he says, " 'Fighting Bill' is all I know," and I says, "Pardner, you think that ain't much to know, but it would have been a college education to me a while ago," and the bartender says, "Do you know him by sight?" I says, "No—by feel."

Well, the poet was right when he wrote:

The moving finger writes, and having wrote
Moves on, nor all your prayers or getting sore,
Can move it back to rub out any debts
Nor copper any bets you've lost before.

And that ain't no figure of speech. Amen.

DOBIE.

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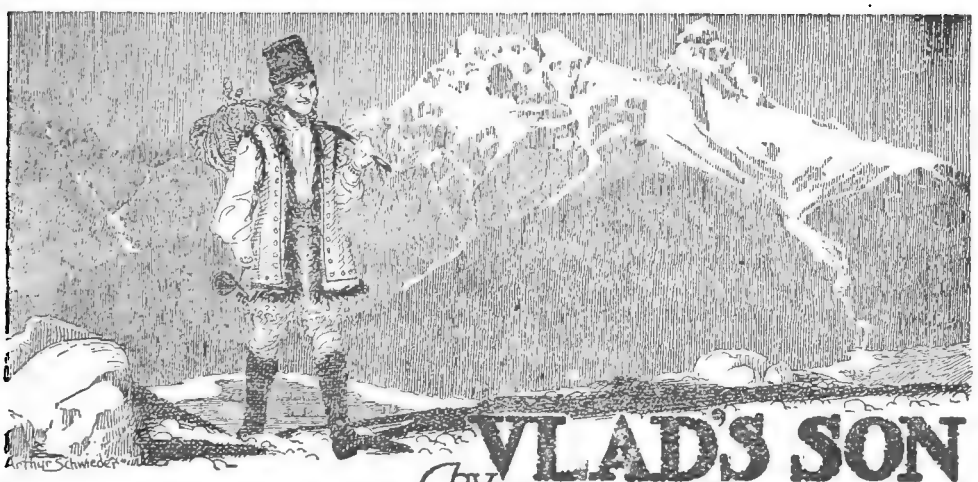

VLAD'S SON

By Konrad Bercovici

IT WAS my father's boast that he had half of Europe at his feet. A flat-bottomed rowboat or a spacious log raft was always moored to an iron ring embedded in the rock on which we built our home on the shore of the Danube. And every good Rumanian holds that the Danube is half of Europe.

Back of the house rolled an undulating stretch of pasture-ground, in which roamed the cattle of the village. It was the common pasture-ground of the community. The cows came there from a distance of miles early every morning and returned home by themselves in time for the evening's milking. And watch-dogs, sure-footed and heavy-coated, did their hereditary duty without any one's paying any special attention to them. Food they had in plenty; the slaughter-house was not far from the pasture.

Twice every year the same stretch did duty as fair-grounds. Early every Spring, even before the snow had melted, tents and shanties were put up and for fully ten days before Easter the peasants of our village and the surrounding villages, with their women and children, were in the *khan*—the inn—from early morning to late at night.

At the close of the fair there was not a red copper left in the district. Most of the money had gone to foreign lands. From the Tatars the Rumanian peasants bought young long-horned oxen; from the Russians, furs; long-haired, heavy-mustached Hungarians from Budapest and short-sighted Germans from Leipzig sold them plows and cultivators, and coming from far America, a Yankee salesman sold brightly colored harvesting-machines, binders and mowers, which attracted considerable attention, not only for themselves but because they were brought from America—from far away, from so far away. . . . This alone gave them a romantic glamour in the eyes of the Rumanians.

The Spring fair was the buying-fair, but in the Fall, after the cattle were stabled, the wheat threshed and the corn put away in the cribs, the fair-grounds were given over to the selling of the products of the land—wheat, rye, corn, honey, sheep, pigs, cows and horses. The peasants brought all they had to the *yarmarock*. The money thus obtained for their products in those ten days was all the income for the year. And those ten days and the ten days after and more, if the Summer had been a good one and prices decent, were days of great gaiety, with the never ending music of the *Tziganes* and the never ending flow of newly pressed wine, oozing from the wooden wine-press directly into the earthen pitcher, and never ending dancing, singing and shouting.

And not a day passed without a wedding. It was the month of *Sfintu Dumitru*, the month during which nearly all the weddings of the rural districts of Rumania take place.

The yearly Fall fair of Cerna Voda was one of the best known in Rumania. The

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Gipsies swarmed in from all sides. Horse-trading tribes came in their high-wheeled wagons drawn by small Moldavian ponies; coppersmith tribes came on foot, the men carrying the kettles and tongs on their backs and the women in gaily colored dresses embroidered in gold and silver were holding the small children on their shoulders, balancing the family belongings, the blankets and the quilts on their heads, while the older children, half-naked and barefooted, marched in droves back of the tribe. And Gipsy musicians played the violin and the flute on the road, as they marched to the yearly Fall fair of Cerna Voda, quarreling, fighting and holding musical contests under the blue sky on the edge of a forest, with their bare feet dangling in the water of some lake or brook.

And one must not forget the blond Slovaks and Croats, as they came in their furred pants and long sheepskin coats, with heavy rolls of steel and copper wire dangling on their shoulders, working as they walked, twisting the wires into all sorts of useful things—rat-traps, sieves, rings, dog-collars and clothes-pins, calling out their wares to the empty space by sheer force of habit; docile and patient beasts of burden, known never to grumble, never rest; traversing Rumania from one end of the Carpathian Mountains to the other in one year and all the length of the Danube to where the river falls into the Black Sea in the following year, lying down to sleep where the night overtook them, in the dust of the road in Summer and in hastily built snow-huts in the Winter.

To the people of Cerna Voda, in fact to the whole population of the Dobrudja, Vlad's Gipsy tribe was one of the best known. All his people, men, women and children, were never referred to by their names. The peasant merely designated them as a Vlad man or a Vlad woman.

Vlad, the chief, was the ruler; his word was law for the four score and more people composing his tribe. And before his wrath they all trembled and the strongest of them was cowed by just one glance from Vlad's lone, big dark eye.

The Gipsy chief was a tall, straight, well-built man of fifty, with long red hair and beard, with a thin black mustache hardly covering a high overlip under a clean-lined nose. As lithe and noiseless as a panther in his gait, quiet-spoken, calm, one felt at the sight of him the born ruler of men, the man who dictated life and death.

He never bartered. But before any deal was closed by any of his men he was consulted and his word was the last one. His knowledge of horses was uncanny, and the peasants were convinced that he could speak to a horse in its language and order it to do just what he wanted.

It was also known that Vlad was the best horse-thief, and because he had never been caught, he was held in great respect. No matter how well a horse was guarded, if Vlad had taken a fancy to it, the animal disappeared from the stable. And once gone, it was gone forever. And because Vlad stole only the best, it was a compliment to the owner when the lone-eyed, red-headed Gipsy chief stole the animal.

THAT year had been a great one for the farmers on the shore of the Danube. There had been plenty of rain in good time, and when the wheat was ready to be harvested, the sun baked the ground dry. The sheaves had never been heavier and the corn too had yielded more than in any other year.

Because of drouths in other places, grain prices were so high that after the Fall fair was over each peasant had more money in his pockets than he had ever had before. There were not enough musicians to play at all the weddings that took place, and each wedding feast lasted at least three days. The *Tziganes*, the musicians, *lautars*, worked themselves to death, snatching bits of sleep on their feet as they played the interminable waltzes and *doinas* for the joyous youths.

In the thick of this joy, on a Friday, Vlad's tribe arrived from the Black Sea. Much to the chagrin of his son, Radu, who was in love with Anica, the daughter of the innkeeper of Cerna Voda, the chief had miscalculated the time and the tribe was too late for the fair. But because men and beasts were tired Vlad decided to pitch camp on the fair-grounds and rest. They had some very fine horses with them and some black sheep they had brought from Astrachan to sell for breeding purposes.

The peasant youth had arranged a horse-race for the following Sunday. Among the riders was Tudor, the mayor's son, on a little filly that he owned. She was the pride

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of the village. Mara, the little filly, won the race before she started from the post. If the others partook in the race at all, it was to see how far behind the little filly they could run.

The eyes of every one were on the little chestnut filly which stowed away space and air and seemed to be thirsty for more and more space to conquer with her outstretched neck and fuming nostrils.

After the race was over the whole village surrounded Tudor and his horse. The men shook hands with the young man, the women covered him with flowers and the young girls braided colored ribbons taken from their own hair into the mane of the little filly. Vlad, the Gipsy, stood at a distance, outside the circle of Tudor's friends.

From the instant his eye had taken in the sweep of the little mare's shape he had thought of nothing else. He had never owned a horse that he liked so well. Not even that black stallion, Stica, for whom the whole tribe mourned when he died.

Vlad had thought Stica to be his last love, that his heart would never more go out to a horse, and suddenly that little filly caught his eye and awoke his inherent slumbering passion—a passion which only those of Gipsy blood can understand.

Unable to hold out any longer, the Gipsy chief approached the beaming Tudor and throwing his arm round the horse's neck, he brought out the right from his pocket full of gold, and said—

"Take it all, and give me the horse, Tudor, son of Miron."

Tudor trembled as he pushed away the handful of gold.

"This horse is not for sale, man. Take your gold away and don't tempt me."

The offer of a handful of gold was a great compliment, coming as it did from Vlad, the best horseman in Rumania, but the boy loved the horse and he knew that the innkeeper's daughter, Anica, would never forgive him if he ever parted with Mara. Tudor knew that, because he knew how passionately she loved the horse, and he also knew that if she had consented to marry him instead of Radu, Vlad's son, it was only because he was the owner of Mara.

"This horse is not for sale, Vlad," he repeated again and again, as he pushed the proffered gold away.

The Gipsy, still with his left arm around the horse's neck, called to one of his men and spoke a few words to him in his own language. The man dashed away to the chief's tent. The peasants watched the transaction. Vlad looked with his lone eye at Tudor, and the boy fidgeted with the fringes of his red sash and repeated:

"It's not for sale, Vlad. It's not for sale. You don't understand, Vlad. I can't sell this horse."

The Gipsy messenger returned with two leather pouches, holding one in each hand. Vlad called Tudor nearer to him.

"Open your hands, boy," he called out, and as Tudor did so, he poured gold-pieces from the pouch into the cupped palms.

"Is that enough?" he asked when one of the pouches was empty.

TUDOR raised his eyebrows and looked at the peasants who stood with mouths agape at the sight of so much gold. No one said a word. Tudor was vacillating, when he suddenly saw Anica coming on a run from the inn.

Flushed, perspiring, the clean-limbed, dark-eyed daughter of a Gipsy woman and a Rumanian father rushed up to the boy and with her breath still hot she asked—

"You did not, did you?"

His hands were full of gold and Vlad's hands were round the filly's neck.

"No, I did not, Anica," he answered.

"Then why does Vlad hold the horse?"

"Let go of Mara, Vlad," she said, trying to pry his arm loose. "And you, Tudor, give him back his gold, or all between us is broken."

"Oh, I see," Vlad remarked. "This is Anica, the innkeeper's daughter, is it not? Where is Radu? Is he not with you? He was so anxious to come to Cerna Voda—because of you. Or is this not Anica, the innkeeper's daughter?"

"So she is," the peasants echoed.

"Well, well, look how fast she has grown!" Vlad continued in an oily voice. "And Tudor is—bless me, bless me—and I thought she was in love with my son, Radu—bless me, bless me— The ways of women, the ways of women!"

"I will have none of your Radu; I will have none of your people—puppets without a will of their own, who forever depend on what Vlad will say or do," Anica shouted at him. "And do please let go of that horse and go God's way. Let go, I say," she

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screamed, as she tried to lead the horse away. "Let go, let go."

Vlad looked at her.

"Hold out your hands, Anica," he ordered, and as she obeyed without thinking, the Gipsy chief emptied all the gold of the second pouch into her cupped hands.

"And I shall pay all the wedding expenses besides," he announced, winking to the peasants, "and I will have to buy a beautiful girl for my son, Radu—one more beautiful than you, Anica, if possible."

People looked at one another, not daring to say a word lest the spell be broken. Tudor looked pleadingly at his flushed Gipsy girl. So much gold all at once for a horse! It was a fortune. She met his gaze with contempt.

"No, Vlad, that horse is not for sale. As for the wedding expenses, I give thanks to the Lord that I am not an orphan. Take your gold," and before Vlad had time to utter another word, she emptied her hands, made Tudor empty his into the Gipsy's coat pocket, and with one jump she was on the horse and up and away from the fair-grounds.

Vlad, pale and shaking as with the ague, looked to the perplexed Tudor, shrugged his shoulders and gave a short laugh before he left the crowd to enter his tent. The peasants then surrounded the excited boy and said—

"You'd better get the money, Tudor, and let him have the horse."

"When Vlad wants a horse, he gets it," said the village priest. "We know that, don't we, people?"

"Yes, he has a way with horses. He casts a spell over them and they evaporate like thin air from the stable. You may guard the stable day and night, and the horse disappears. He bewitches them," explained another man.

"He does, he does," many assented.

"Have you not seen how he looked at the little filly? Who knows but what the two spoke together when he had his arm around her? Who knows? Who knows?"

"Nonsense," said young Tudor. "It's my horse and I won't sell it. Have I not as much right to own the horse as a *Tzigane?* What?"

"The truth of the matter is," explained Jonica, the oldest inhabitant of Cerna Voda, "that Anica does not want him to sell the horse. You know, Anica, really—because of her mother's blood— When they love a horse they sacrifice everything, are ready to do anything—trample upon others and even destroy themselves for a horse, for a particular horse."

"Have you not heard?" remarked another man. "She marries Tudor instead of Radu because Tudor owns the horse, and Vlad. Vlad is ready to break his son's heart for the same horse. Ah, these Gipsies!"

NOTHING else was talked about at the inn.

All the horse-lore of hundreds of years was reviewed, and it was agreed that the price Vlad had offered was the weight in gold of that little filly. And as the wine mounted to the heads of the peasants, bets were laid as to whether Vlad would get the horse or not.

Anica, barefooted, fleet-footed, dressed only in a long white shirt of linen belted at the waist, served the drinks at the tables.

"No, the horse is not for sale," she said in answer to all inquiries.

"But, girl, you know very well that if Vlad wants the horse nothing will stand in his way. You know that, don't you? And is it fair to Radu to leave him for Tudor because of a horse?" asked old Jonica, the village's old story-teller. "And Vlad will get the horse anyhow."

"Nonsense. Tudor will hold watch day and night," the innkeeper's daughter interrupted him, "and he can shoot straight. As to Radu, you don't understand, Tata Jonica, you don't understand. He is only a puppet, not a man. He should have been here four weeks ago. Why did he not come in time?

"He did not. He did not come because his father had willed otherwise. He, Radu, has no will of his own. That's it, Tata Jonica."

"Just like her mother, Reposata, may she rest in peace," muttered the old peasant to himself as he watched Anica rush from table to table. "Ah, that Gipsy blood, that tempestuous blood!"

"Ah, youth, youth," the older peasants laughed. "Tudor will watch over the horse! As if it mattered. Vlad will call and it will come. He once bewitched a horse, and it came to him when he called—came riding through space on a broomstick."

The village split into two factions. One

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believed that the Gipsy would get the horse, and the other that he would not. They said that Tudor and Anica were a match for any Gipsy.

That very evening a dozen youths offered to stand watch at night to relieve Tudor. One climbed on the roof, armed to the teeth; two young boys posted themselves in the stall, and the four sides of the stable were guarded by two men on each side with a sentinel pacing up and down two hundred feet away. For it was known that Vlad's cunning was much above the ordinary. At midnight the guard was changed, and at daylight the whole village was at the *khan* to inquire about the horse. Was Mara still there?

Vlad too came in and was followed by his son, Radu. The young Gipsy, the image of his father, walked up to Anica, and leaning far over the bar, he spoke to her.

"So that was behind all you said to me yesterday? *Hein*, Anica? So that's what you did, Anica? Because of a horse you threw me over for the mayor's son. What is he more than I am, I ask? Is he stronger than I am? Is he richer? What? As if I could not give you a horse just as beautiful! What?"

"No," answered Anica, "you could not keep a horse if your father ordered it sold, and for so much gold, too. He, he is his own master, not a puppet of his father as you are. You are not even known by your own name. You are known only as 'Vlad's son.' Fancy how they would call me 'Vlad's son's wife.' Phew!" and she spat on the floor and threw back her head as she showed a row of glittering white teeth.

"Vlad is a chief, but he is my father," Radu answered. "I am sure that he would not be against giving you whatever you want if I asked."

"Not at all," retorted Anica. "Only yesterday he offered to pay the expenses of the wedding between Tudor and myself if I would let him have the horse."

Radu bit his underlip and kept quiet.

"And you are all, all of you, sheep, cowards. Tudor is a man. I never knew it until yesterday. Four handfuls of gold for a horse, and when I said 'No,' he did not have to ask his father. No it was."

"Much of a man, the man who does what a woman wants," sneered the young Gipsy.

"But he did not have to ask his father. He did it because I wanted. He did it to please me. To please me," and she beat her heart proudly as she looked defiantly at him.

She served drinks to a few people. When she was free again Radu leaned over the counter and spoke once more.

She did not answer. She remembered long walks in the night—kisses, embraces, promises——

He looked into her eyes as he drank the full quart-pitcher of wine in one draft.

"And suppose he would have sold the horse, what then?" he inquired. "Suppose he loses the horse, Anica? Suppose he loses the horse?"

"There is not enough gold in the whole world to buy that horse from Tudor, and he guards it with his life," she replied to the subtle proposition made by the young Gipsy.

Vlad, who sat all alone at a table, heard the words of the girl and snickered. The Gipsy girl looked at him and trembled.

"You had better advise Tudor to take the money," whispered a newly arrived customer in the girl's ear.

"Keep quiet, you drunken weakling," she hissed back.

Marin the innkeeper came in from the back door. His eyes were still heavy with sleep. He yawned as he took a long drink of prune-juice to put himself in shape for the day's work and offered the bottle afterward to his customers.

"Good morning, Vlad. Here is his son too, grown big and strong. Take a sip, take a sip. Here, it's a man's drink."

Anica looked at Radu, as much as to say—

"Do you hear how they call you?" and the boy bent his head in shame.

While they were talking Tudor came in with his father. The mayor, Miron, shook hands with the Gipsy chief; they were old friends—had swapped horses many a time, had drunk from the same glass in token of friendship.

"Glad to see you, Vlad."

"Glad to see you, Miron," Vlad answered, as he made room for the mayor at his table.

"Marin, bring a fresh pitcher and give wine to the men."

VLAD and the mayor drank quietly and spoke about the harvest, the fair and the prices of wheat and corn. The mayor had an inquisitive mind and wanted to know news and gossip of

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other places; wanted to know about the Tatar chief who had been killed by one of his women in Cocosh, fifty miles from Cerna, and about the new bridge that was thrown over the Danube.

Vlad knew all about everything, because he traveled. Miron read about the happenings in the only newspaper, which came once a week to the village and which he used to explain to the assembled peasants in front of the little church on Sundays after services.

Excepting the priest, he was the only man who could read—with great difficulty, it is true, and half the words used by the writers were a mystery to him, but he could get the drift of what he read and translate it into the flowery language of the Rumanian peasants—the old Latin dialect, ornamented with Greek, Turkish and Russian.

Radu and Tudor stood leaning against the counter. Both were being served by the innkeeper's dark-eyed, dark-haired daughter. Each talked to her without looking at the other. Without any exchange of words a drinking-contest was started between the two. Such contests ended only when one of the contestants fell to the floor, drunk and dead to the world around him.

"A pitcher of last year's wine," ordered Tudor.

"And of the same for me," ordered Radu, and both young men gulped down the blood-red juice in one draft.

It was a contest not only of quantity but one of speed also. The peasants looked on and got ready to take up wagers.

"Another one," demanded Tudor.

"Here too," motioned Radu.

"Here, Anica," motioned the mayor's son, as he gave the empty pitcher again to the girl.

"Here too, and bring me a two-quart pitcher this time," the Gipsy boy ordered.

Anica hesitated. In a drinking-contest the same measure was served to the contestants. It was an old rule. And Radu was strong. He could drink, she knew that.

"Just bring him a pitcher the same as mine," Tudor spoke excitedly as he straightened up.

"I asked a double pitcher," insisted Radu, as his fingers coiled around the hilt of his knife, which protruded over the broad red belt.

He looked only at the girl, facing her across the counter.

"Give what I ordered."

The mayor and the Gipsy chief had watched the contest between their sons from their seats on a bench behind a table on the farther end of the wall. They were watching the contest with extraordinary intensity, which they screened with talk about crops and travel.

But the moment Radu had grasped the hilt of his knife and the peasants had drawn in a circle to make room for the fight, Vlad jumped up and yelled to his son—

"Return to your tent!"

Radu's fingers uncoiled from the knife, his arm dropped limply by his side and he prepared to leave. He looked into the lone eye of his father as he retreated from the counter. He looked again at his father and at the girl, and as the door framed his erect body, he called out—

"Father, you have gone too far."

Then he laughed and stepped out into the road.

"That's what I call a father's rule," spoke an old peasant.

"Radu is just a plain coward," said Anica, as she went on with her work. "No man could order me around that way. And he is a man! Calls himself a man, ha!"

A WEEK passed and then another week, and the horse was still in Tudor's stable. The youth of the village watched over it day and night. After the second week Vlad could no longer enter the inn without being jeered at. That it should take him so long to make good the silent threat was a sign of decay. He was getting old, too old.

Everybody looked at him with contempt. The people who had bet that he would get the horse wondered that he, Vlad, should have lost his cunning, and the young men who watched the horse openly laughed at him.

"Vlad's other eye was the better one," they said to one another loud enough for the Gipsy chief to hear.

He had lost his other eye in a fight with a Tatar whom he had killed.

His own people too began to lose faith in him and no longer feared their ruler. Several deals were closed by his son, Radu, without his permission. It was an infringement of his law unheard of at other times.

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But his son and the other dared more and more.

Vlad had met Radu late at night hovering around the stable where the filly was kept, and although he had ordered him away, he had met him there again and again and had to make believe that he did not see him at all.

The Gipsies asked one another why they were still staying in Cerna Voda. Through Vlad's miscalculation they had missed the fair, and now they were missing the great fair at Constanza on the Black Sea. All because he had become infatuated with a horse.

Of course they knew what such passion meant. Each one of them had at some time or other been attached to some beautiful animal, and each one's heart had been broken. Some of the horses had died, others became crippled and were shot in mercy, and still others were sold at the orders of Vlad when some big price was offered. For Stica, the stallion he had loved so much, Vlad had given away every pet horse and almost all the gold of the tribe; even to the *salbas* (necklaces) the women had worn.

They could never forget or forgive that. He was a passionate man, Vlad was. His passions were his chief strength. And he broke the passion for woman or horse of every other man as soon as it was manifested, lest one of them grow strong with the rising passion and dare oppose his rule when occasion offered.

Only the ruler had a right to strong passions. Such was his dictum. And now a slip of a girl was opposing him! He knew, and his people knew, that Tudor did not count. And if the will of a girl was stronger than his passion, than his cunning, he was no longer fit to rule.

All this was now muttered of and spoken about under their breaths. It was time one called him to accounts. He was a great chief and all that, but every once in a while all they had saved in years was given away in a day to satisfy one of his whims.

And he broke every one's heart. Nothing was sacred before the fire of his passion. The Gipsies grumbled, but no one dared say a word before the face of the chief.

Vlad grew thinner every day. He had loved women and had grieved when he lost them. He had loved horses and had been ready to pay the price of fools, but never yet had there been a woman or an animal that he could not get when he wanted. There was that Circassian slave-girl he had stolen from the harem of a pasha. She was Radu's mother. Much chance the pasha had with all his eunuchs once Vlad had set his eye upon the girl! And before that he had stolen the daughter of a Boyar and made her his wife.

And from that Russian general in Bessarabia, whose stables were guarded by armed soldiers day and night, he had stolen the best horse. The general called him into his room afterward and gave him hundreds of gold-pieces. Vlad recalled how the officer's hands shook as he begged.

"It was the horse on which the Czar has mounted, the horse on which the Czar has mounted! I shall have to commit suicide if it is lost."

He returned the horse and ever since the general had been his best friend. And now whatever plan he laid was thwarted by Anica, one of his own people on her mother's side.

But never had he loved a horse so much as he loved that little filly, and never before had his reputation or his rule been at stake. It was a fatal day on which he had seen it. The whole affair had gone too far. He could never rule his people if he were to give it up. Radu and some others were already doing things without asking permission.

And the peasants made fun of him! On the Sunday after the first snowfall of the year a young peasant came up to him riding on an old nag and in mock seriousness offered the nag for sale to the Gipsy.

"You see, Vlad, I have decided that as a great chief you are entitled to own the best horse in the country."

He had become the joke of the village. Vlad could see that in the eyes of the innkeeper and his daughter. Miron, the mayor, smiled every time he saw him. Only some of the oldest peasants were not convinced of the Gipsy's defeat. The priest said it every evening at the inn, as he drank his last glass before retiring.

"Vlad will get the horse. The young pups will soon grow lax. He bides his time. You will see, Vlad will get the horse."

BUT the young peasants did not intend to grow lax. The old barn was fitted out with tables, benches, barrels and pitchers, and soon became the meeting-place of the boys and girls of the

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village. Anica was there every night and her laughter could be heard above the din and noise.

Tudor was the host. His little mustache was waxed now every morning until its points were like needles, just to show his pride and insolence. To taunt Vlad he rode his horse up to the Gipsy's tent one Sunday.

"How do you like my little filly, Vlad? She is not bad to look at, ha?"

On the fourth Sunday after the fair the priest announced the wedding of Tudor and Anica.

Radu managed to see the girl alone. He begged her to marry him instead. How could she throw him over like that?

But Anica sneered:

"Marry you? You! And have your father order you, 'Return to your tent,' when a man insults you! I marry a *man*. A man who is his own master. A man who refuses handfuls of gold for a horse, when I love the horse and who knows how to guard the horse even against Vlad. That's the *man* I marry. Nobody will ever speak about him as the 'mayor's son.' You could not keep the horse against your father's orders. You could not keep *me* against his orders. You are afraid of him. You would not dare to do anything without his permission. How can a woman love, marry you? How could she?"

She said this and many other things, even if her heart was not as set as her tongue was cutting.

Radu was handsomer and stronger than Tudor. There were things about him she liked. Her blood echoed to his. But she hated the slavish submission to Vlad. Why did he not act like a man? She had heard of at least one occasion when Vlad took to his tent the bride of another man on the wedding day, just to assert his rule.

The young Gipsy cried. He showed her the tree near which he had first kissed her. He reminded her how she had sworn love to him and how she had taken him away from Maria, the blacksmith's daughter. But she would not hear of it.

No, she was going to marry a man who was called by his own name and not after his father. A man who could keep a horse she loved. Who could refuse handfuls of gold.

"Handfuls of gold, handfuls of gold," she repeated.

A man who dared, who was brave and cunning, who could guard what he had, what she loved.

The conversation between the two had taken place on a Wednesday evening. The wedding between Anica and Tudor was to take place on the following Sunday. The *khangiu*, the innkeeper, engaged the best musicians. It was to be one of the most lavish wedding feasts. From Sunday to Sunday. The whole *khan* was decorated with colored papers and holly and paper lanterns of all kinds. In the kitchen a dozen women prepared viands and spicy food for the men.

It was to be such a feast as the village had never seen. No limit to the quantity of wine and brandy. Wedding presents for the couple were piled up against two walls. On one wall, what the women had given—the best of their looms, rolls of homespun linen and coarse silk, *borangick*, that had been blanched for months in the sun. Mats, rugs, embroidered towels and folds upon folds of narrow belts of silk, *betele*, that hold together the two halves of the peasant women's skirts.

And leaning against the other wall, visible to all, were the presents of the men, each piece separate—pistols of all makes, knives with silver and ivory hilts, guns, long Turkish swords, yataghans, fur coats, fur hats, boots, pipes, cartridge-belts. Oh, they were not niggardly, the men of Cerna Voda, and God had been good to them that year!

And just as all this was looked over and the last few benches were placed, early in the morning on Sunday, Tudor fell headlong at the door of the inn, pale and shaking.

He had just enough strength left to blurt out, "The horse, the horse——"

"The horse what?" yelled Anica, as she shook his limp arm.

"The horse—the horse—" the boy tried to explain.

"Tell me what has happened—is she killed? Did she die? What? Tell me," Anica begged, crying with anger. "Tell me, Tudor, tell me, tell me!"

But Tudor was becoming incoherent in his speech. He only repeated, "The horse—the horse."

Leaving Tudor prostrated on the floor, Anica darted away to the stable of the filly. It was empty.

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In a few minutes the inn was beleaguered by the whole population. The priest passed by on his way to church. After he had heard, he did not go any farther. He knew that nobody would come. The excitement was too intense. The horse had disappeared from the stable. How? When? No one knew. The young men who had been in charge of the night watch had ridden away to find the horse, vowing they would never return without Mara.

When the excitement was at its highest, Vlad came rushing to the inn. The older peasants gave him a rousing welcome. The younger ones looked to him with a mixture of awe and contempt. A supernatural being, Vlad, the great chief. A sorcerer!

"Vlad is *still* Vlad," said the priest. "You thought you knew better, *hein?*"

Jonica slapped the Gipsy chief on his broad shoulders.

"Well, well, it was *we* against *them*," he said, showing the older men on one side and the young men on the other.

"But what does it all mean?" asked Vlad.

"It's about the horse, you know," said Marin, the innkeeper, clinking glasses and laughing his broadest.

"What has happened to the horse?" the Gipsy yelled with all the strength of his lungs.

"Come on, come, come, we are good sports," said several peasants as they dragged the Gipsy toward the counter. "The best wine here, Marin."

VLAD tore himself away with one jerk and rushed to the dejected Tudor.

"What's the matter with the horse, you young good-for-nothing?"

"Stolen, stolen, stolen," and he spat in disgust.

The older peasants laughed at the comedy, and the priest forgot all dignity and swung his hat and giggled—

"Look at Vlad; look at him!"

In a moment there was pandemonium in the inn. Anica, on coming back from the stable, threw herself at the chief's feet and begged him to return her the horse.

"It is my horse," she cried.

He looked hard at her.

She screamed that it was because of Mara that she had agreed to marry Tudor. It was her horse. Her horse.

Vlad swore that he knew nothing about it. His face twitched and changed colors until it turned a sickly green, as if it were bruised from the inside. He threw himself on the bench near the crying Tudor and he too sobbed.

They did not believe him. Jonica and the priest, his stanchest admirers, least of all. The mayor came in and laughed as he shook the limp hands of the chief.

"Good work! I told you, Tudor, that sooner or later he would get the filly."

"But I did not, Miron. I swear I did not."

They laughed. Ah, Vlad was having some fun!

Soon all the Gipsies were in the inn.

They laughed and made much noise.

"Drinks here. Vlad is *still* Vlad."

What did they think of him, *hein?* Watch a horse when he wanted it! There was no better man in the country, in the world.

Vlad was sick of denying that he knew anything about the horse. Anica swore that the wedding was off; that she would never marry a man who could not watch a horse well enough.

During one of her passionate outbursts Radu entered the inn. His twinkling eye met the gaze of the innkeeper's daughter and she trembled from head to foot when he left the inn as unobserved as he had entered it. Vlad saw his son leave and prepared to leave also.

"Listen here," said the mayor. "Return the horse. We shall settle that later."

"I know nothing about the horse," answered Vlad, and fell limply on a chair. "I wish to —— I did."

All eyes were turned on the two men. The mayor was not fair. One should not speak to Vlad in that way. One could read in their eyes that such was the thought in the heart of the peasants. No. One should not speak that way to Vlad.

"I will put you in chains, Vlad. The joke has gone too far. Show us where you have hidden the horse," and the mayor tried to assert his authority.

"I know nothing about the horse," assured Vlad, and his voice, broken and feeble, trembled.

"It's time for the wedding," broke in the priest in a conciliatory tone as he placed himself between the two men. "We shall speak about horses later."

Tudor got up from his chair.

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"There will be no wedding." Anica stamped her foot and beat the table with her hands. "The man I marry must be a *man*."

She had hardly finished the last word when Radu, mounted on the stolen filly, rode to the door of the inn.

"Mayor," he yelled, "leave the poor old man in peace. It is I who took the horse," and before any one could say a word Anica had jumped up behind him on the chestnut filly.

"Eat the wedding feast by yourselves. We will get married in the church of the next village."

Vlad left the inn, staggering on his feet like a drunkard.

"So he did it! He, he, he!"

Radu now had found strength and cunning in his passion. It was all over, all over!

When Radu returned to Cerna Voda the following day, his father had disappeared. He, Vlad, refused to be known merely as Radu's father.

And the people made merry, sang, drank and danced for seven days and seven nights. Yea, they sang and danced and drank for seven days and seven nights!

SAILOR'S COUNSEL

by Gordon Seagrove

SAYS Jim to Bill: "To look at me
What's took a chance on every sea
You'd never think I'd own to fear;
I do, bedad—
I've always had
A missus waitin' on the pier!

"When we was hooked I had my charms;
You'd think she'd open up her arms
An' sing out jolly: 'Jim, my dear,
Come, kiss your pet.'
But, mate, I get
A thumpin' whack acrost the ear!

" 'You're home at last,' she says, 'to snore
An' track your sea-boots on my floor
An' bring your friends to drink my beer
An' rant an' row;
Just tell me now
How many girls you kissed this year.'

"That there's no way, I claim, to treat
A husband who sends home a neat
An' tidy bit o' wage each year.
I want a hug,
A cider-jug,
An' not a bash acrost the ear.

"You're single, Bill, an' single stay;
Don't let no wench make eyes your way—
Just back your yards and keep a-clear
The weddin' ring,
Unless, by jing,
You want a missus on the pier!"

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THE OLD ORDER

by Harrison Howard

Author of "The Red Fire," "The Weight of Reputation," etc.

THEY were vigorously youthful, each having about him an air of intense modernity which was thrown into bold relief against the quaint relics of the past that hung upon the walls of the old office. There were prints of ancient clipper ships wheeling gull-like under full canvas; fading portraits of grim sailormen severely bewhiskered; delicate miniatures of full-rigged ships blown in bottles. At the room's corners hung frayed bits of cordage and canvas, each an intended token of some forgotten wreck or rescue.

The young manager fixed his purposeful eyes upon the man sitting opposite him, and with a deprecatory gesture indicated the trappings on the walls.

"Captain Daw, it is just this sort of thing we're trying to get away from. The task of bringing this room up to date I'm leaving for the last, until everything else up here is modern. This company is one of the oldest and most substantial in the West; and we've got to replace ancestor-worship and ancient methods with modern efficiency!"

Captain Daw nodded, permitting a reserved smile of appreciation to lift his generous lips. By comparison with the dim portraits on the walls he seemed scarcely a sailorman. He was smooth-shaven; his clothes were of the prevailing mode; his haberdashery was faultless. He brought his keen eyes back to the new manager from a contemplation of the vast humming lumber-mill visible through the wide windows.

"Yes, Mr. Halburn; times have changed. But modern ways come slowly to men who go to sea. You'll find it far easier to clear the junk out of this room than to put new methods aboard your ships."

Mr. Halburn's tense countenance beamed.

"Exactly, Captain Daw. I am grateful to find that you perceive my ideas and the task I face. The junk must go—the musty old methods are so much dead weight about our necks. I wired you the offer to become pilot of our bar-tug as a beginning. She, sir, is the backbone of our marine department."

He paused, handing a cigar to the other; then went on:

"Everything depends on getting our vessels towed in and out over the bar without delay. If they are held up just because some old salt doesn't like the 'feel' of the air or some such ridiculous superstition we are then flagrantly inefficient!"

The young captain smiled repressingly once more.

"You, Captain Daw," the manager continued warmly, "have the reputation of being imbued with the modern spirit. And we here are forever finished with the old."

He struck a match with an emphatic gesture.

"We don't want masters who pamper a ship like a child and who look upon her as

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an object for human affection. The old captain who stands on his bridge and goes down with the ship is romantic, I'll grant. The pilot who wastes a week beating about rather than take a legitimate chance is estimably sympathetic of his ship. But we don't want romance, sir, we want dividends!"

"I believe I comprehend, Mr. Halburn. But what of the man I am relieving?"

"Captain Yallot is an old man—a straight-laced ancient. He has been in the employ of the firm since long before you and I were born."

Captain Daw peered intently at the other, his jaw stiffening.

"And what provision is being made for him, Mr. Halburn?"

"You need have no fear of taking bread from an old man's mouth." The young manager laughed. "Captain Yallot will be pensioned on full salary as long as he lives."

Captain Daw bit the end from his cigar and relaxing upon the chair, nodded.

"Then I accept the berth, Mr. Halburn—at fifty per cent. increase over Captain Yallot's present wage."

Mr. Halburn's eyes momentarily clouded.

"That's rather stiff, Captain Daw."

The young pilot shrugged.

"It is a principle of modern business that when you have something which can not be got elsewhere the price is what you name it. You want a pilot of the new school. Can you lay your finger on another capable of handling that bar and whom the insurance underwriters will accept? Sailormen of the new school are only just developing—they're still on deep water in the big ships."

"You are quite right, Captain Daw." Mr. Halburn smiled appreciatively. "I know of no other pilot who will fill the bill I have specified; and as you say, the underwriters are wary of Suicide River. So we will consider the bargain closed."

A light knock sounded and at Mr. Halburn's response an emaciated little man opened the door and stepped inside. Between his heavy thatch of white hair and the hedge-like growth of whiskers appeared a face tanned to the hue of old copper, intricately seamed by age and weather.

The manager rose to his feet.

"Ah, Captain Yallot, you are just in time. I want you to meet Captain Daw of whom I spoke. Captain Daw, Captain Yallot."

Captain Daw rose to his six feet of muscular bulk and advanced upon the tiny wisp of a man. Captain Yallot accepted his hand and the younger man was surprized at the sturdy pressure returned.

"I am honored, Captain Daw," the ancient intoned, bowing formally.

"A pleasure, Captain Yallot," the other returned breezily.

"They are making fast the deck lashings on the barge, Captain Daw. She will be ready to tow out on the five o'clock tide."

"Thank you, Captain Yallot. And I understand that I am to be honored by your making the first trip with me, sir."

A clandestine smile was exchanged between the two young men at this covert imitation of the ancient's formality.

"It is I who shall be honored, Captain Daw." The oldster paused, his meager eyes kindling. "You are getting a fine ship, sir." An unsteady note was audible in the voice. "Her lines are perfect."

"Lines, captain? Oh, to be sure! But has she a kick in her propeller?"

The ancient blinked.

"Oh, yes; surely, captain. And she has a soul, sir! You'll feel it when you take her wheel."

A faint smile upturned the young giant's lips as he looked down upon the wasted figure.

"And does she handle well, Captain Yallot? Turn in her own length?"

"*Err*—satisfactory, sir. Entirely satisfactory."

He paused a moment considering; then murmured:

"A fine sea ship, Captain Daw. A vessel to be proud of!"

Across the wide-topped desk the two young men exchanged appreciative winks.

THE bar-tug *White Fleck* steamed smartly down Suicide River under a lowering sky. A high wind swept directly upon her as she laboriously plowed across the treacherous bar, and when she swung out into the open sea and wheeled southward the full breath of the December storm smote her.

From her stern a thick cable of steel swung aft fathom upon fathom, disappearing through the hawse-pipe of the gigantic barge in tow. The deck of the barge was

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piled high with freshly cut lumber, above which extended the mast and the stilted wheel-house where the single helmsman was making hard work of keeping his unwieldy charge in line.

For all the imposing weight of her close-piled cargo the barge took the shouldering seas from off-shore heavily. At each treacherous blast that came hurtling out of the black void to seaward the bulky vessel heeled deeply, her wet prow rearing skyward to fall with a trembling impact.

The automatic towing-machine on the *White Fleck's* poop kept the unsteady tow-line taut; with almost human sentiency it reeled in the moment the cable became slack. Captain Daw mentally blessed the contrivance as he gripped the tug's wheel, skilfully keeping her into the seas.

"A dirty night it'll be, Captain Yallot," he called above the fury of the wind to the tiny wisp of a man who stood peering through the port window of the pilot-house.

"A night for real sailormen, Captain Daw," the other replied, turning toward him. "I am old enough to be your parent, sir, so I hope you will not be offended if I make bold to compliment you. You have the true hand, sir—the God-given feeling of your ship."

Captain Daw turned briefly to glance at the other.

"It comes from experience, sir, hard work, and calculation."

The oldster nodded solemnly.

"And instinct, captain. True sailormen are born, not made. It's like the knowing of a natural father for his son."

A tolerant smile played about the young pilot's lips as he dropped the window before him and thrust his head out into the rising fury of the storm. When he raised the sash again, Captain Yallot continued:

"Take Mr. Johnson, your mate, for example. Though he go to sea to the end of his days he'll never have the true hand. He lacks—*err*—imagination."

Whereupon Captain Daw laughed politely.

With the coming of darkness the storm steadily increased. Time after time heaving seas broke over the *White Fleck's* trim bow, lashing aft along the narrow fore-deck to thunder against her house. The raucous breath of the gale smote the tug like a vicious hand beneath which she was quelled. She heeled deeply, only to rise again and plow into the onrushing seas.

Through the after window the men in the pilot-house could make out dimly the barge laboring behind. She was being raked by recurrent seas which broke explosively over her blunt prow and burst into dancing white spray, which appeared through the darkness like vast, spectral flowers which bloomed and faded against the black wall of the night.

The storm was rapidly achieving a climax of fury. The *White Fleck* brought up abruptly upon the crest of a mighty sea, her propeller out of water. Instantly her power was turned off, she paused trembling as if in mid-air, then scuttled down into the trough. Her propeller whirled once more and she gathered herself for the forward plunge.

A vast sea smote her thunderously, and the moment following she seemed struck an amazing blow from aft. She was twisted deeply from her course and would have taken the seas broadside but for the action of Captain Daw's hands on her wheel.

The two men in the pilot-house looked at each other startled. A heavily breathed sigh escaped Captain Yallot; Captain Daw swore vividly.

"What in —— was that aft?"

The words were scarcely off his lips when the thing happened again. For one blinding instant the pilot believed that the *White Fleck* was pounding on a rock. Perspiration sprang out upon his forehead; the next moment the pilot-house door was flung open and Mr. Johnson the mate, night-glasses in hand, stood breathless in the aperture.

"The barge, captain, sir! She's wild! Her wheel-house has carried away and I find no trace of the helmsman!"

The mate gulped heavily.

"The wheel appears to be intact, but of course he didn't have time to lash it. The towing-machine is taking up some of the jar, but it can't stand much more. She's jerking on her stay-bolts now."

Not the barest hint of indecision or hesitancy clouded Captain Daw's eyes. Merely his jaw stiffened as he asked—

"You are convinced, Mr. Johnson, that the helmsman has gone overboard?"

"He must have gone with the house. There——"

The three men grasped blindly for holds.

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The *White Fleck* rose with a weary sigh, trembled from stem to stern, then settled down with a vicious twist as the great bulk of the barge swung her out of the course like the tongue of a whip.

Captain Daw said:

"She won't stand many more like that. Mr. Johnson, you will take in as much of the cable as possible, then cut the tow adrift!"

A gasp of dismay escaped the lips of Captain Yallot. The mate touched the visor of his cap smartly and hurtled off into the whistling darkness. Captain Daw turned his glowering eyes upon the old master.

Captain Yallot swallowed grotesquely.

"You—you're going to cut the barge adrift?"

"Exactly, captain!"

He made no attempt to cloak the sharp irritability in his voice.

"But captain——"

The new pilot interrupted with an impatient laugh. He understood the other's excitement; it was the fundamental concept of the old order that the master shall stay by his ship no matter what the peril.

"I know what you are going to say, Captain Yallot; but times have changed. It's a business proposition, sir, not a sentimental one."

His eyes did not leave the vista of high-running seas before the tug's bow as he went on:

"That barge and cargo, sir, are worth so much and can be replaced with just so much ease. This tug is worth so much and can be replaced with just so much difficulty. Put them in the balance, captain, and the answer is to cut the barge adrift."

The oldster shook his head dazedly.

"But surely, captain, there's a chance to save the tow."

"And a bigger chance of losing both by trying."

They started abruptly and stood listening. The rumble of the automatic towing-machine reached them as it began the work of taking up the excess length of cable. Again a tremulous paroxysm shook the *White Fleck;* she paused shuddering, then valiantly plunged on.

The young pilot glanced significantly at the old master. Captain Yallot had straightened to his full height; an imposing dignity now invested his meager being.

"Captain Daw, our ideas are utterly different and I admit I scarcely understand you. But I'd like a chance to save that barge. I beg of you give me command of her; let me board her; and if then you consider it necessary to set her adrift I shall be content."

The younger man's eyes opened to ludicrous width.

"Board her! Man, have you lost your wits?"

"I think I can board her, sir!"

A derisive laugh mounted to Captain Daw's lips. He stared incredulously at the other much as one observes an engaging curiosity in a museum. There was something uncanny about the certitude in the oldster's attitude that sent a quiver to the roots of his hair.

Captain Daw was visibly impressed. "How—how long do you want? She can't take many more of them!"

The light of struggling hope leaped in the other's faded eyes.

"Perhaps ten minutes, sir!"

"Ten minutes to board that ——?" he echoed in amazement. "Man, I'm convinced you've lost your senses! But it's worth the chance. If that barge is still wild in ten minutes she's cut adrift!"

THE ancient sprang forthwith from the pilot-house; the door banged emphatically behind him. Captain Daw turned his head and peered out through the after window beside the door.

The towing-machine still rumbled as it drew the laboring barge closer. The tug's house extended too far aft to permit him a view of the poop; he saw only the glistening black cable sweeping off into the gloom toward the vague bulk floundering behind.

The tug was struck another blow from aft, was flung perilously into the trough of the seas. Stark fear broke upon Captain Daw, as the *White Fleck* did not at once recover, and he cursed the aged madman and all his tradition-haunted kind who stand on their bridges to go down with their ships.

He glanced impatiently at the illuminated dial of the chronometer. Six minutes had passed; the rumble from the poop continued. Glancing again through the after window, he was startled to see the plunging bulk looming blackly astern. The old man

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must be insane to bring that floundering barge to so short a line.

An access of fear-riven anger flooded him. Why had he permitted that ancient lunatic to indulge his worship of the old, which could have no effect other than to risk the *White Fleck* and perhaps destroy her? Wasn't he himself of the new? Nothing short of weak will had let him succumb to the other's plea. The old fellow was stark mad, ridden with the superstitions and ghosts of romantic ancestors who had killed fine ships in the pursuit of musty ideals.

He glanced eagerly at the chronometer. The ten minutes were up and so was the rule of the old! He turned from the wheel, snatched a megaphone from the wall, and kicked open the pilot-house door. The door flung outward and locked open against the wall. Captain Daw raised the megaphone, directing its muzzle toward the black aperture of the doorway.

His lips were formed for the word to cut the tow adrift but he started violently and paused. The automatic towing-machine had suddenly stopped; the quivering black cable arched glistening through the storm-lashed darkness; the great barge, perilously close, was taking sea after sea with crazy antics.

A shout rose from the hidden poop; Captain Daw recognized it as the old master's. Mr. Johnson the mate replied feebly. Perspiration sprang out upon the pilot's forehead; he was confused, uncannily disturbed, unable to conjecture what madness was being perpetrated upon the unseen poop below.

Abruptly then his eyes went wide with incredulous amazement. He gasped aloud and fell back a step as if before a physical onslaught. Only for a moment, however, was he the passive spectator; then the ardent seaman in him swept commandingly into ascendency. Tense and alert, he whipped squarely about, gripping the wheel, every element of skill in him feeling for the rhythm of the waves, working the helm ever so delicately and skilfully to keep the tow-line steady.

And, as he swung his gaze aft again, his eyes fixed at once upon the tow-line at the point where it became visible over the house. He had not been mistaken; the black object still clung there like a monkey beneath a slender limb, worming its way along the cable toward the madly plunging barge.

Foot by foot the old master descended the festooned tow-line. His progress was halted time and again and he seemed to draw himself up around the string of steel as the wild tow snapped out of line and sent a mad quiver along the spume-drenched cable.

As he reached the low point and began the arduous ascent toward the blunt prow beyond, Captain Daw's staring eyes took on an expression of unmistakable fear. Captain Yallot couldn't make it; the idea was preposterous! He was an old man; already wave upon wave had drenched him; he must be growing numb.

Yet as the moments passed the object clinging to the cable grew steadily fainter, less definite of outline. The barge heeled deeply; a withering paroxysm was communicated along the tow-line to the tug. Captain Daw swung about to his wheel, all his skill brought into play. And when he glanced aft once more the sweeping line was empty.

An unspeakable oath trembled from his slack lips. His eyes grew deep, remote as they stared upon the empty string of glistening steel. He breathed laboriously as if in acute physical pain and seemed to feel the imminent presence of Captain Yallot's ghost. The roots of his hair bristled. It was standing just beside him, rigid with the dignity of splendid traditions held inviolate. Captain Daw attempted to laugh; the effort ended piteously as there was given birth within him a sudden all-commanding respect for the old.

With startling clarity he saw again the old mill office adorned in musty trumpery of the past—ancient cuts of fleet clippers, portraits of stern sailormen, intricate miniatures of splendid ships blown in bottles. He had laughed politely at them—before.

The thought broke upon his confused consciousness that Captain Yallot had countermanded the order to cut the barge loose and he must summons Mr. Johnson to reassert the order. He was amazed to find the idea suddenly repulsive. He paused, considering. He knew now how Captain Yallot felt when he had voiced the command to cut the cable. A shudder ran through him.

The ancient's sacrifice had yielded that

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which now made the proposition unthinkable. A sailorman—a real sailorman—stays by his ship. The young pilot unconsciously straightened. The barge would remain. If peril came he'd go down like a man on his bridge!

He realized presently that the barge's mad antics had diminished appreciably. The towing-machine seemed functioning normally once more. For the moment he thought that the seas had abated, but a swift glance proved this an error. He peered aft once more to find the barge dropping astern. The mate was playing out the cable.

He snatched up the megaphone and was raising it to his lips when the white face of Mr. Johnson appeared in the open doorway.

"My —— sir, he was just in time! Five minutes more would have yanked the stern out of her. As it is she'll need calking and the towing-machine——"

Captain Daw's lips quivered.

"In time, sir?"

Mr. Johnson peered into the colorless face of the new master, then stepping forward to the wheel, handed his night-glasses to Captain Daw.

The pilot crossed to the doorway, raised the glasses to his eyes and with unsteady forefinger adjusted the focus. He swept the deck-load and fixed his gaze upon the wreckage of the wheel-house aft. There stood an absurdly diminutive figure with arms spread out like an eagle's wings as he grasped the spokes of the huge wheel. Captain Yallot had disappeared from the cable—over the barge's prow.

The young pilot lowered the night-glasses and leaning wearily against the casing of the doorway thought once more of the dim mill office with its fading cuts and portraits and slender miniatures blown in bottles.

UNDER the early morning sun the bar-tug *White Fleck* steamed majestically over the bar at Goose Harbor and swept up the winding channel to the bay where the big lumber schooner lay waiting to take the cargo of the barge for reshipment to San Francisco. With a skill which elicited silent praise from the steam-schooner's master, the pilot maneuvered his tow alongside and made her fast.

When the tow-line had been taken aboard Captain Daw rang for full speed ahead, turned the *White Fleck* on her heel, and sped for the dock at the edge of town. As the tug's guards touched the fender-piling of the wharf he summoned the mate.

"I'm going up-town, Mr. Johnson. Take the tug back to the barge and get Captain Yallot. I'll probably be back here as soon as you are."

He sprang to the cap of the wharf and strode rapidly up the board-paved street. Going directly to the telephone office, he put in a call for Mr. Halburn on Suicide River.

The manager's voice was anxious.

"Yes, Captain Daw. And did you make it all right?"

"The tug and barge are here, sir. The barge is discharging to the *Mainfare* now."

"Splendid, captain. From the weather reports I was afraid you'd have trouble."

Captain Daw laughed, and thereupon launched a conversation which rapidly became a heated argument. Mr. Halburn swore, cajoled, threatened. Captain Daw delivered himself with completeness and dispatch and hung up.

When he reached the wharf the tug had already returned. He found Captain Yallot in the pilot-house perched on the meager settee, staring fixedly at the hardwood spokes of the *White Fleck's* wheel.

He glanced up from bright eyes as the young pilot entered.

"Good morning, Captain Daw."

He gestured impulsively toward the wheel.

"Are you not convinced now, sir, that you have a fine craft? Ah, sir, she knew you needed her best last night and she gave it!"

Captain Daw nodded solemnly.

"I have just been in communication with Mr. Halburn. His orders to you, sir, are to have the fore-deck calked and when you are shipshape again bring the barge back to Suicide."

Captain Yallot rose slowly from his settee.

"His orders to *me*, sir?"

The barest flicker of a smile played at the young pilot's lips.

"Exactly, Captain Yallot. I am no longer in the employ of the Deep Water Mill Company."

There was positive injury in the old man's eyes.

"Surely, captain, you're not disappointed in the *White Fleck!* She's a fine, stanch ship, sir!"

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Captain Daw bowed formally as he had once seen the other do.

"Too fine, sir, except for real sailormen. Captain Yallot, this berth is too small for me now. Last night I ceased being a mere pilot, and now in addition, thank —— I'm a sailorman!"

The oldster leaned heavily against the *White Fleck's* polished wheel.

"You—you are leaving these parts, captain?"

"My train sails in fifteen minutes. I'm going south to the Golden Gate after a job that's mine for the asking. For a year I've been afraid to tackle it but I'm ready now."

He advanced smiling upon the bewildered ancient and pressed his hand warmly. "Good-by, Captain Yallot. You've done much for me, and I've got just one more thing to ask of you. Could you tell me where I can obtain one of those miniatures blown in a bottle?"

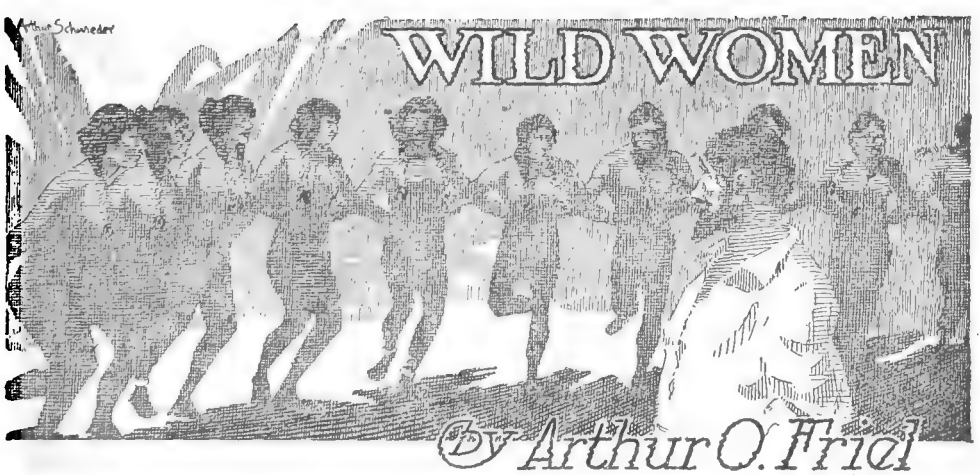
Captain Yallot's faded eyes sparkled.

"Why—why, I have several, captain, and if you will mail me your address when you're berthed I'll gladly send you one."

"Thank you, captain, I'll appreciate it. They—they're a fitting ornament, sir, for a sailorman's abode."

He touched the visor of his cap smartly after the manner of sailormen and turning about, crossed to the door. On the threshold he paused, and said over his shoulder:

"By the way, captain. Be sure to remind Mr. Halburn of his promise over the phone that as an inducement for you to take the *White Fleck* again your wages are to be advanced fifty per cent. But even if you should forget it, I don't think Mr. Halburn will."



Author of "The Tucandeira," "The Vulture," etc

SO THE first Amazons were women warriors of Europe who cut away their right breasts in order to handle their bows more freely and so were called A-mazos, meaning "without breast." And this river Amazon got its name from the fact that old Orellana, the first white man to descend it, had a fight with a Tapuya tribe whose women fought beside the men, and named the river for those women warriors.

Yes, I heard that tale before about Orellana, *senhores*, and it may be true; for rivers and towns often are named for people. This upper Amazon where we now are is known to us Brazilians as the Solimoes, because an Indian tribe of that name once lived here. And the town of Manaos, toward which this steamer is carrying us, is so called because the region near the Rio Negro was the country of the Manaos savages. But my own idea about the name of this river is that neither Orellana nor those fighting women had anything to do with it, and that it really comes from our Indian word *amassona*. That word means "destroyer of boats." And if you know the Amazon, with its sudden storms and great

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floods and *terras cahidas*—falling banks which topple thundering into the water and crush or swamp any small boats near shore—you will see how well that word fits.

Yet it does not matter. The thing which most concerns us is that we are outward bound, you two *senhores* sailing back to your North America and I to my old home below the Black River. You have spent months exploring the jungle of the Javary, and I have passed years there as a rubber-worker, and now we all are interested more in what lies ahead than in what we leave behind us. But your talk of those ancient Amazons interests me much, for it brings to me the memory of a queer thing that happened not long ago. And now, since you have told me a tale of wild women, I will repay you in your own coin.

This thing came about, *senhores*, not on our own Javary, but on the Jurua, a sluggish and very crooked river to the east. When the flood-waters were high I had gone there with my comrade Pedro, a rubber-worker like myself, who burned to avenge an old friend tortured and crazed by a tribe of beast-men called Uginas. We had found the lair of these brutes, shot down many of them, driven fear deep into the rest, and burned their filthy huts. And now, after sleeping a night at a secret camp of ours farther down the stream, we packed our canoe for our journey back to the Javary.

This was easy work for Pedro, who had come unhurt through the fight with the Uginas. But it was not so easy for me because I had been struck in one foot by a dropping arrow, and this morning every step hurt me. When all was ready my partner stood looking thoughtfully at me. Then he said:

"Lourenço, let us stay on this river a few days before going back. The rubber-forests are drowned, and we can do no work there. The journey back is hard, and the strain of paddling and moving about will not do your sore foot any good. We have plenty of food and nothing to do, and we have never been on the Jurua before. So let us drift down-stream a while and see what we may see."

"But we shall lose the channel on which we came across from the Tecuahy," I objected.

"We can probably find another," he said. "Those flooded *furos* are common enough when the water is so high. If we can not find one we can come back to the one we used before."

My foot gave a sharp twinge then, and I agreed. We paddled down a little creek, swung into the winding Jurua, and floated away westward.

IN THE next few days we found nothing new. The country around us was mostly swamp, and both the low-lying *ygapo* and the higher *vargem* lands now were submerged under many feet of water. On each side the usual matted wall of trees and vines rose out of the flood, and the only soil remaining uncovered was the highest terra firma. The weather was that usual in the wet season—dull sky or tremendous rains or bursts of blinding sun. Through this we floated on around the twists and bends of the slow-moving stream, sleeping wherever we could, eating *chibeh* or dried fish, watching lazily for anything that might come and giving my bad foot a chance to heal.

This, of course, grew tiresome. We could not even hunt, for the trees seemed to hold little life, and whenever we found a *restinga*—a neck of land running back between two stretches of flood-water—the thick bush and my lameness prevented us from going far along it. So as soon as my foot became better we decided to seek a channel on the northern side and start working back toward our own country.

Then, as we were turning our backs on the Jurua, something happened.

Behind us sounded a long soft whistle. We turned and looked. At that point a *restinga* stood up from the waters, and the sound had come from that land. As we listened it came again.

"A *mutum!*" muttered Pedro, his eyes shining. "And it is down on the ground instead of overhead. What luck!"

It seemed luck indeed, *senhores*. The *mutum* is a fine big bird, and after living for days on fish and farinha the thought of broiled fowl made our tongues drip. Turning the canoe, we went back with swift but silent strokes.

As we reached the land we heard the same whistle, and then another one in answer. Both seemed near, but the bush was rather thick and we could see no life. I pointed to my foot, shook my head to show Pedro I would not go ashore for fear of stumbling and making a noise, and

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motioned for him to go after the birds. He nodded, stepped out, and slipped smoothly away into the tangle.

Holding the canoe still, I waited. The whistles sounded two or three times at intervals, and they seemed to be going away from the river. I could picture the birds poking along and seeking food, and Pedro stealing after them with rifle ready, but I could neither see nor hear anything to tell me how the hunt went. It seemed that my comrade had been gone for some time when finally I heard a shot.

The bark of the rifle came from some distance back in the bush. I listened eagerly for another shot which would tell me that the second *mutum* also had been killed. None came. Instead I heard a confused noise as if a struggle were going on, and then sounds like voices.

Grabbing my rifle, I jumped out, yanked the canoe up on shore to prevent its floating off, and worked into the bush as fast as I could go.

In doing this I could not help making some noise; and, knowing that any one there could hear me coming, I decided to make as much noise as possible. I shouted to Pedro several times, changing my tone to make my voice sound as if more than one man were calling and purposely shook the undergrowth as I passed through it.

I had no idea as to what was happening, or whether anything really was wrong. But the thought of savages was in the back of my head, and if any were there I wanted to make them think a number of men were coming to aid Pedro.

The only effect this had was to prevent me from hearing anything ahead. And I soon learned that it did not deceive any one. Coming out into a place where the bush was not so thick, I saw three figures rise suddenly from the ground.

I threw up my rifle, but did not shoot. Just as my trigger-finger tightened I saw that all the strangers were women.

FOR a minute I stood there staring at them along my rifle-barrel. They were nearly as tall as I, and, though slender, they were full-breasted and fairly broad of shoulder and looked strong. They were lighter than most Indians, for their smooth skins were not copper-brown but of a reddish tan color. Their hair, I noticed, did not hang loose, but was coiled snugly around their heads, making them look somewhat like men. Their faces, too, were strong and resembled those of men rather than of women. And their attitudes quickly showed me that these were no shy, shrinking maidens.

Each held a bow ready to shoot, and each arrow pointed straight at my body. Yet they did not seem hostile. They held back those arrows just as I held back my bullet; but it was perfectly plain that if I should shoot one of them the others would strike me down.

Much puzzled, I lowered the rifle and uncocked it. They in turn let their weapons sink, though they still held them ready. We stood watching one another for a moment longer. Then the whole thing suddenly seemed funny to me, and I laughed.

They smiled in answer, and the smile softened their expressions so that now they did not seem like men at all. One motioned for me to come farther back into the bush. Knowing that Pedro must be somewhere behind them, I nodded and went straight ahead.

They waited until I passed, and then followed close behind me. I had taken only a few steps when a sudden blow struck my rifle and nearly knocked it from my hand. The woman at my heels had done this, and as I turned she seized the gun and tried to yank it from me. But I kept my grip and twisted it out of her hands. Then, angered, I told them not to try that trick again.

They laughed as if it were only a joke, and one of them spoke in a sort of Tupi dialect. She asked if I was afraid to be among women unless I had a gun, and the other two laughed again in a way that made me uncomfortable. But if they thought to shame me into handing over my rifle they were dealing with the wrong man.

"I am no fool," I growled. "And if you would be treated like women you had best behave like women. If you act like men I will treat you as men, and it may not be pleasant for you."

Two of them frowned, but the one who had teased me smiled again and looked at me with eyes dancing. They were big brown eyes, and I noticed now that she had very good teeth, and with that smile brightening her face she was not at all bad-looking. Her figure, too, was almost perfect. Like the others she wore only a

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tanga—a wide strip of bark-cloth around the hips. This was not much, but it was far more than some savage women wear; and from this and their intelligent faces and shapely bodies I knew these people were of a higher type than some I had seen.

I did not smile back at the brown-eyed girl—indeed, I scowled all the more; for it does not always pay to let a woman know you approve of her. Nothing more was said, and I turned away, keeping a tight grip on my gun. I need not have been so careful, though, for they tried no more tricks. The four of us passed quietly onward until we came to Pedro.

He was leaning calmly against a tree, with the butt of his rifle resting on the ground, and talking with four more women. When he saw me he laughed.

"Greetings, old hater of women," he said. "I am glad to see that you are safe. You were bawling so loudly that I thought all three of your girls must be kissing you at once."

"They are not my girls," I disputed. "And do not call me a hater of women, for how can a man hate a thing in which he feels no interest whatever? Perhaps I did bawl, but I was not so much afraid that I had to shoot, as you did. What is the meaning of all this? And are no men here?"

"Yes, there are one and a half men—myself and you," he answered teasingly. "It took seven women to capture me, while three were too many for you. There are no other men that I have seen. And this means that we have been tricked and are prisoners at the mercy of these strong-armed ladies. I do not know what our fate is to be. Perhaps they will love us to death. That would be a sad end for you, but I think I could die happy."

He glanced at the girl nearest him. I looked at her and saw that she was quite handsome. When I say that, I mean that she was not pretty in a girlish way, but handsome as a man would be, and as Pedro himself was; tall and straight, deep-chested and firm-breasted, with strong arms and shoulders, regular features, and a straight steady gaze. She was much the best-looking woman there, and it was easy to see why Pedro's eyes turned to her. At the same time I thought that if she should take the notion to "love him to death," as he said, he might not find it so funny after all.

"I do not quite see how we were tricked as you say," I told him. "Where are the birds we heard?"

"These are the birds," he explained, nodding toward the women. Then he spoke in Tupi to the handsome one, telling her to make the call of the *mutum*. She lifted her hands and whistled between them, and the call was perfect.

"They drew me back here with those whistles," he went on, "and then six of them hid and jumped on me all at once while I was following the sounds made by the seventh, thinking she was the *mutum* ahead of me. The shot I fired was an accident—they startled me so that I pulled trigger and hit nothing. After that we danced around together until I saw they were women, when I stopped trying to fight and began to talk. Any woman would rather talk than fight, so we were becoming quite friendly when we heard you howling. Then three of the girls went out to welcome you."

"I see," I said. "And now that I am welcomed, what happens next?"

THIS he did not know. So he asked the woman beside him, and she answered that we were to go with them to higher ground some distance away. I asked what we should find there, and she told me that in that place were more people. Then I inquired where the men of the tribe were, and got a surprizing answer. Her tribe had no men at all.

When we asked more questions about this we got no satisfaction. They became impatient, said we should learn about that later on, and told us to come.

I did not like this for three reasons. First, it displeased me to be told by women what I should do. Second, I had hurt my foot again in my haste through the bush, and the thought of traveling far on it was not attractive. And last, it would not do to leave our canoe where it was for any length of time, for a storm or a rise in the water would sweep it away. So I said rather shortly that I would not go; that Pedro could visit that place if he wished, but that I was going back to the canoe.

At once their faces grew cold. Three of them stepped back and lifted their bows. The handsome one beside Pedro spoke sharply, telling me I must come. And then Pedro added:

"Did you not hear me say we are prisoners? This is not so much of a joke as

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you think. True, we have kept our weapons, but we are outnumbered and they are determined to make us do as they wish. More than that, they are women, and we are no woman-fighters. If we do fight it will be no matter of scratching and pulling hair—there will be no killing. And they are only asking us to come with them. Now do not be sour. Let us go and see whatever we may."

I grumbled about my foot, but before I made a flat refusal I happened to glance at the brown-eyed girl who had first spoken to me. She had not raised her bow, but stood quietly watching me. Now she smiled again. And without thinking why, I suddenly decided that Pedro was speaking sense and I ought not to be sour about the matter. So I said I would go, but insisted that first the canoe must be put in a safer place.

Pedro agreed with me on that point, and, after looking keenly at us, the handsome one also agreed. But she said both of us need not go back for that, and as I had a bad foot I should stay here while Pedro attended to the canoe. So she and two others went with him, leaving four to watch me.

Having nothing to do but wait, I knelt and examined my foot. As usual, my feet were bare, for I do not wear boots in the bush unless there is some particular reason for it. The arrow-wound, which was partly healed, had been torn by som thing I had struck on my way from the river, and now it was bleeding. Seeing a tiny pool of rain-water near me, I limped over to it and bathed the wound. While I was doing this the women talked, and then the brown-eyed one slipped away into the jungle.

Soon she returned with some *isca*, a tough substance made by ants, which is good to stop bleeding. Kneeling beside me, she placed this on my hurt, wrapped some leaves around it, and bound it on firmly with bush-cord. Still resting on one knee, she asked me how I had received that injury. So I told her of our fight with the Uginas.

All listened closely, and when I finished the tale they nodded approvingly.

"Such men breed fighters," one said in her Tupi tongue. Again the others nodded. I asked what the speaker meant by that. They all laughed and made no answer. And then Pedro and his four escorts came back.

"So they are kneeling to you already," he said, his eyes twinkling. "I should have known better than to leave you alone with them. You pretend to despise women, but when you have them all to yourself it is a different thing."

I promptly told him he was a liar, and he laughed as if I had said something funny. The brown-eyed girl rose hastily, but with a graceful ease that told of lithe muscles, and, pointing to my foot, spoke to the handsome leader. The tall woman nodded, but I saw that she gave the other girl a rather sharp look. Without speaking, she motioned for us to march.

With three girls ahead of us and four behind, we filed away into the jungle. The undergrowth was not so thick here, and I went on without much trouble. But I could not help limping a little, and I felt like a clumsy cripple as I watched the women ahead, who swung along with a velvety stride and smoothly swaying bodies, making no sound except a slight rustle of leaves. Pedro, watching them too, spoke over my shoulder.

"Lourenço, a man is an awkward, heavy-footed creature when compared with a woman."

"Yes," I admitted. "But a woman is not the only creature that travels smoothly. So does a cat. So does a snake. So does a vampire bat."

As I spoke the brown-eyed girl turned, looked down at the foot she had bound for me, and asked whether it hurt much. I said no, and felt a little ashamed of my last remark. Pedro chuckled.

"Be sure you speak in Portuguese when you make such answers," he said. "Your friend will not love you if she knows you call her cat, snake, and vampire."

I snorted, but said no more.

THE ground, I noticed, was gradually rising. I expected that on the highest point we should find the place where these people lived. This proved true. After a time we entered a cleared space, and in this stood a long, low house.

It was much like the *malocas*, or tribal houses, of certain savages in our own Javary region, but not so large. Its walls were not more than eight feet high, and its roof was low, without much of a slant.

Knowing how close to each other the inhabitants of such houses usually slept, I judged that there might be a hundred women

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living here. But later I learned that this was too large an estimate, and that there were hardly more than half that number.

Several women were working at something near the one small door of the *maloca*, and as we came out of the bush they stood up and stared. The girls around us called to them, and I caught the words *apuyah* and *camarah*, meaning "friendly men." At once the others began to cackle like a bunch of hens, and I saw heads appear in the doorway.

Our guards spread out now, and we walked nine abreast toward the house. I tried not to limp, with the result that I walked stiff-legged, and I must have looked about as dignified as a jabiru crane with his toes bitten off. But the women ahead stared at us as if we were the most wonderful things they had ever seen.

By the time we reached the house at least twenty women were waiting, and more were coming out. The chattering increased so that we could make nothing of it except that all wanted to know where and how we had been discovered. While this went on we stood quietly looking them over, noting that all seemed fairly young and that there were neither any very old women nor any small children. I tried to pick out some one of them who might be in command as a *tushaua* or chief, but could see none. So I touched the arm of my brown-eyed friend and, shouting to make myself heard, asked whether they had a chief.

She nodded and shouted back that we should see the chief, who was very great. Just then a commotion started at the back of the crowd facing us, and she said the chief was coming now. I looked, expecting to see a magnificent woman decked in a brilliant feather dress and grave and stately of manner. But as the others gave way to let the ruler pass I found myself mistaken.

The chief was great indeed, but not as I had thought. She was great with the greatness of a tapir. The best way I can describe her to you, *senhores*, is to repeat an expression I heard one of you use a while ago—"big fat slob." That woman was a big fat slob.

She waddled like a pot-bellied duck, and the rolls of fat on her flapped like jelly. Out of that fat oozed beads of sweat, and her face was greasy with it. Her *tanga* was askew, and looked like a rag stretched around a barrel. And her feet—*senhores*, I never saw such feet in my life. They looked more like a pair of shovels.

And not only was this dainty creature so charming in appearance, but she was drunk. She staggered in her walk, and how she managed to swing those huge feet without kicking herself I do not know. When she stopped before us and squinted at us through twitching lids I caught a whiff of her breath that reminded me of a jug of rum.

She stood there a minute, swaying on her thick legs and looking us all over. As I gazed back at her and remembered what a splendid savage queen I had expected to see I could not help grinning. And whether she thought I grinned because I liked her I do not know; but after staring tipsily at me a minute she wrinkled her fat face in an answering smile. Before I guessed what she intended she lunged forward and embraced me.

I tried to shove her away, but her hold was too good. Both those huge arms were around me, squeezing so hard that I felt as if my stomach would pop out of my mouth. She buried her face in my neck, snorting like a dolphin coming up for air and rubbing her cheek against my jaw. And when I tried to kick her fat shins and make her break away I found I could not—she was standing on my feet.

I heard Pedro yelping with laughter, and the sound maddened me. I managed to get an arm under her chin and force her back. Then I clawed myself loose.

My rough work angered her. She glared at me. But my brown-eyed girl began to talk rapidly, pointing to my bad foot and telling the ruler she had hurt me. The fat one stared at the foot, then at my face, and her thick lips twitched. Then her eye went to Pedro. And suddenly she swept an arm out and caught him as she had caught me.

He too sprang back, but not in time. It was my turn to laugh, and I did.

"You said if you were loved to death you could die happy," I reminded him. "Now die like a man, and do not look so miserable."

"Pull her away!" he gasped, wrestling with her.

"Not I," I refused. "She is dying for love. Take pity on the poor little thing, comrade, and treat her tenderly."

He gave a despairing gurgle, and I doubled over with laughter. Others laughed too, and I saw that my brown-eyed friend

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was shaking with mirth. The tall handsome girl who had brought us there, however, was not laughing at all. She was biting her lips, and her eyes showed anger. But as my comrade still strove to free himself, she prodded him with a finger and gave him a warning shake of the head. So, though his mouth was twisted with disgust, he stood still and waited for her Royal Fatness to release him.

But she kept her grip, and I became sorry for him. Also, I thought of a plan that might give us a breathing-spell. So I suggested:

"Tell her we want rum. She will drink with us, and she is so unsteady now that a few more drinks may put her to sleep."

He did as I said. Her head was on his shoulder, and he spoke into the ear nearest his mouth, telling her we were glad to find ourselves so welcome here, and that we should like to show our friendship in a little drink of *cauim* if there was any. With another hug that nearly broke his back she straightened up and laughed in a throaty way. There was *cauim* in plenty, she said, and we should have all we liked. With that she turned around carefully, got her feet pointed toward the door, and lurched away into the *maloca*.

Pedro drew a long breath, as if he had been under water a long time and had just come to the top. Seeing that the women expected us to enter the house, we followed the fat one through the little doorway and down the long room to a huge hammock.

She flopped into this, lay there grinning, and then called for liquor. Some one brought a big jar of strong-smelling stuff and gourd cups. I poured the liquor, and I took care to give her the biggest cup and fill it to the brim, while I left our own only a little more than half full.

We found the rum strong and fiery, but we pretended to swallow it eagerly. She gulped down the whole gourdful in a noisy, thirsty fashion, and reached for more. I gave her another good measure, and then we sat down in near-by hammocks and talked.

She asked whence we came and why, and we told her. We spoke slowly, swallowing a little now and then from our cups and filling her gourd as often as we could. Once I spied a smile on the face of the tall handsome girl, and knew she understood our plan and was amused by it. Some others smiled too and nudged one another, watching the fat one.

She drank a surprizing quantity of the *cauim*, but at length it overpowered her. The gourd fell out of her hand, she laughed foolishly, her eyes closed and opened a few times, and she began to snore.

THEN we drained the cups we held, threw them aside, stretched ourselves and grinned at the other women. They laughed, looking with some contempt at their stupefied ruler.

"Now, girls, let us become better acquainted," said Pedro. Speaking to the tall girl, he added: "I have told you that I am Pedro. Who are you?"

"Tata," she answered with a calm smile. I thought the name did not fit her well, for the Tupi word *tata* means "fire," and she did not seem at all fiery. But then the thought came to me that fire is not always quick and fierce—it may burn quietly; and smoldering flame is the more dangerous because it is hidden. Remembering how she had bitten her lips while she watched her chief slobbering on Pedro's shoulder, I said—

"You had best be careful, or you may be burned."

"I would rather be burned than drowned in sweat," he answered, glancing sourly at the sleeping chief. "Tata, what is the name of this one?"

"Amuy—the rain."

"*Por Deos!* It is a good name for her. She leaks at every pore. Bring me some water, that I may wash the grease of that creature off me."

Tata smiled again, but replied that she was not a carrier of water, and that if he wanted some he could get it for himself. He frowned at her, but she made no move. But then some other woman brought up a jar of water for him, and he began bathing his face and arms. While he did this I asked the girl who had bound my foot what her name was.

"Jahy," she told me.

At first I thought that name badly chosen, for *jahy* is the moon, and this brown-eyed maid was slender and graceful. Yet there are few things more beautiful than a slim young moon sailing up in the night sky, and as I realized this I told her she was *jahy ahuh*—the new moon.

"Ah, what a change!" Pedro gibed. "A while ago women were snakes and vampires

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to you, and now you rave of the new moon! Do not tell me again that I am likely to be burned. You are moon-struck!"

"The moon does no harm to men," I retorted.

"No, oh no. It only twists their brains and makes them mad."

I told him I could take care of my own brains. And then, to show him how little I cared about his teasing, I did a thing which otherwise I should not have done. Jahy, smiling over my compliment and looking very girlish and winsome, was standing close beside me; and I put an arm around her, drew her to me, and sat down with her in the hammock.

The result of this astonished me. Jahy pushed me in a startled way, then sat quiet, looking at me with eyes wide and shining as if surprized but pleased. A sudden murmur went among the other women, and many of them stared at us sourly. As they muttered to one another I repeatedly caught the word *erekuahn*. And that word, *senhores*, means "husband."

Then Tata spoke. She told me that this thing could not be unless the chief gave consent.

"*Ani akuan*—I do not understand," I said. "This concerns Jahy and nobody else. If she is willing to sit by me the consent of that fat drunkard is not at all necessary."

The women murmured again, and Tata looked at me searchingly. Then she quietly said that truly I did not understand. By taking Jahy into my hammock, she explained, I had made her my wife.

And this was not all. The chief, she told me, would say who should be my first wife, and would decide the order in which the other wives should follow that first one. It might be that the chief herself would want to be first wife. And whether that were so or not, I had nothing at all to say about it. All would be settled by the chief.

"*Por amor de Deos!*" I gasped. For the moment I could say no more. My arm still was around Jahy, and I felt that she had grown tense. She was sitting straight up, and she did not appear girlish now. Her face was cold and her eyes hard, and she looked defiantly at all the other women. Her attitude was exactly that of a man who has walked up to a village belle, kissed her, and then swung on other men and asked them what they intend to do about it. She said no word, but it was plain as day that any woman who wanted to dispute for the place of first wife to me would have to fight for it.

I glanced at Pedro. He put a hand to his head as if he were dizzy, and said nothing at all. And after staring around me a minute I told Tata neither of us understood this matter well; that we wanted to know who they were, why they had no men, why we were brought here, what she meant by a number of wives for us, and so on. So she told us all there was to tell.

THEY were women of the Passés, one of the highest tribes of Indians found in this Upper Amazon country. These are a peaceable people who live quietly in groups scattered along the interior rivers, building small villages where they can raise crops and have permanent homes. The group to which these women belonged had lived in a village over to the west of the Jurua country, and there they had been happy and content.

But then had come upon them from the north and west a horde of those fierce *barbaros* who roam the jungle like wild beasts, killing and plundering wherever they find the settlements of quieter tribes. There are many of such bands of killers in the unknown depths of our great southern forests—bloody brutes who spend their lives roving and fighting, crossing rivers by making bark boats and sweeping onward into regions where they have not been before. When they come there is only one thing to do—kill them.

Now the Passés, though peace-loving folk, are no cowards or weaklings. And so when one of their hunters came staggering in one day with an arrow in his chest and the news that a horde of murderers was coming, the men seized weapons and went out to fight to the death.

Even the little boys, except those too young to be of any use, were taken along; for a small boy, with his little *zarabatana* blow-gun and poisoned darts, often can kill men, and the Passés knew they would need every ounce of their power against those invaders. But they did not take their women, for it was not the custom among them for the women to fight. Instead, they ordered them to take their babes and flee southward in canoes, promising that if they won the fight they would meet them again

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at a place agreed upon and bring them back home.

The women never saw their men again. Only a half-grown boy, badly wounded, managed to reach them after the battle. He told them all the other men were killed, their homes were ravaged and destroyed, and the *barbaros* now were searching the bush for the women. They must go on at once, he said. Then he died, and the women and babes fled far and fast to escape the brutes behind them.

In this hard flight all the babies died. The only children to survive were those old enough to endure the hardships they met; and these all were girls. When at last they reached this place and stayed here, it happened that the babes born of dead fathers all were girls also. And so the years passed and the young people grew up without a single boy or man among them.

There were men among other tribes around them, they knew. But the Jurua is an evil river, and the tribes living at its headwaters are either low, vile creatures or brutal savages; and the Passé women, roving the jungle and learning what sort of men were there, had carefully kept away from them and allowed no man to approach their hidden home. Having no men to hunt and fight for them, they themselves had become hunters and fighters; and when any men of the Jurua tribes stumbled on their *maloca* they promptly fought and killed them, so that they should not go back and bring others to overpower them and make them slaves.

Yet, though they lived without men and protected themselves against all dangers, they knew well that in time they would all die out unless men came among them. They had talked of going back to the country whence they came, where they could mate with others of their Passé tribe. But this they had not been able to do because their mothers, who had brought them here, grew too old and infirm to make that long journey, and the girls would not abandon them. So they had agreed among themselves that they must stay here until the old women all were dead, when they would be free to return to their own region and themselves became mothers.

They had also agreed that if by any chance there should come into this place men fit to unite with them, these men should be made the husbands of all. Their ruler, Amuy, who governed them because she was descended from the chief who had died fighting the *barbaros*, should decide the order in which they should mate with any such men. In this way each woman would have a man for a time, and thus no one of them could keep him all to herself and cause the others to be neglected. And now that we had come they would follow this plan. As soon as it should please Amuy to make her decisions in the matter, the mating would begin.

AS YOU may suppose, *senhores*, I was speechless for a time after this. I looked around the *maloca* and saw that, although death had taken away all the older women except two who lay in their hammocks, there were at least fifty waiting to be our wives. I looked at the fat Amuy, and remembered Tata's statement that perhaps Amuy herself would choose to be first wife. From what I had seen of her I was quite ready to believe it; and at the thought my stomach squirmed. After thinking a while I said:

"But two men are not enough to be the husbands of half a hundred girls. We will go out and bring back some of our comrades."

The women laughed scornfully. Tata told us we were not going out. From her tone I gathered that if we did not choose to stay here alive we would stay here dead. And when Pedro found his voice and asked how long they expected us to remain, she said we would never go; that we would pass our lives here and become the fathers of many strong fighting men.

Watching her eyes as she answered him, I thought again of smoldering fire. I thought too that though she spoke so quietly, she was as much determined to be the first wife of Pedro as Jahy was to be mine.

"But we have wives in our own Javary country," Pedro objected. "Wives and children who need us. We must return to them."

Tata looked him straight in the eye. Whether she saw that he was lying I do not know, but it made no difference. She coolly said those wives of ours could get other men to take care of them. We were here, and here we should stay.

Then she told Jahy to leave my hammock. Jahy snapped back that she liked this hammock very well and intended to stay in it.

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Tata looked steadily at her, then lifted her brows, glanced at the sleeping Amuy, and smiled in an irritating fashion. But she said only that now we should eat. And the other women, also glancing at Jahy and at Amuy, turned and brought their *tupé* eating-mats and food.

Pedro and I looked at each other hopelessly, grinned, and squatted beside the mat that was laid before us. Jahy and Tata took places on each side of us, and the women who brought the food to our mat also squatted around it. The food was plentiful and good—fish, fowl, and fruit—and we ate heartily. Then, as usual, we made cigarets for ourselves and lighted them.

The women looked rather scornfully at these little smoke-rolls of ours. One of them arose, went somewhere, and came back with a cigar in her mouth. It was a huge, clumsy thing, looking more like a club than a cigar, for it was as thick as my two thumbs and nearly a foot long. She dropped several more of these on the mat, and each of the girls took one. When all were puffing away the smoke was so strong it nearly knocked us over.

"*Nossa Senhora!*" muttered Pedro, watching a woman dip up a gourdful of that fiery *cauim* and drain it without a quiver. "These are weak, helpless creatures indeed! Perhaps I spoke truth when I said we should be loved to death."

"Have courage," I said. "It is nearly night, and we may find a chance to reach our canoe before dawn."

"Yes, a fine chance!" he sneered. "If you had ever tried to evade a woman you would not be so hopeful. We have just as much chance of escape as if we were two mice surrounded by fifty cats."

I made no answer, for, though I was sure the women did not understand Portuguese, I thought they might read our faces. Yawning, I told them we would like to walk about and see more of the clearing. They assented, and we all went outside.

I limped along rather slowly, and they surrounded us closely all the time, so that we did not see as much as if we had been alone; but we found that they knew well how to take care of the plants and trees. Between the growing fruits and mandioca, the fish of the river and the birds and beasts of the forest, they made a very good living for themselves here, and we should not be likely to suffer from want of food. But food is not everything; and the thought of spending my life in this one small spot was not endurable. I took care not to show this, though, and waited for a time when Pedro and I could talk and agree on some plan.

Night came soon; a night of blackness so dense that no man could see anything his length away. Returning to the *maloca*, where the women barred the door with stout poles, we asked where we should sleep. Two hammocks were given us—not the same ones where we had sat before, but others near by—and this time I did not take Jahy into my bed.

She stood beside me, waiting while I sat and smoked another cigaret. Then she asked if I did not want her.

"Little New Moon," I said, "you are very pretty and graceful, and I see no other girl here whom I would sooner have. Yet since an agreement was made among you girls before we came, it is best to abide by that agreement until Amuy shall say what is to be done. I have taken you once into my hammock, and I do not regret it. But to do so again now would only make bitterness and trouble between you and your sisters, and that would not be well. Let us wait and see what the new day may bring."

She nodded slowly and turned away. But soon she was back with a clay pot and some leaves. Stripping the other leaves and the *isca* from my lame foot, she dipped a sort of paste from the pot and covered the wound with it, then bound up the foot again. After that she lay down in the hammock next to mine and began smoking another of those big cigars.

I LAY for a while watching the shadows thrown by the little fires burning here and there in the big house. As I thought of our position I wanted to laugh and to curse at the same time. Finally I spoke to Pedro.

"Comrade, I have been in queer places, but never in one like this. And I am not anxious to remain in it. Are you resigned to your fate?"

"No, I am not," he admitted. "If I could pick one wife and ignore the rest of them perhaps I could be content here for a long time. And I think that you and Jahy too could be quite happy if you were let alone. But to be passed around from one to another is not to my liking, and to have

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no choice in the matter is worse. And worst of all is the fact that we shall be nothing but slaves, without any liberty whatever. They treat us with some consideration now because we are new to them, but after the newness has worn off we shall be no better than dogs."

"You have it right," I agreed. "To take a woman because you and she want each other is one thing, but to be forced into a mating is much different. And to pass a lifetime as a slave is not to be thought of. I care more for my liberty than for my life, and so do you. Yet I do not see how we are to free ourselves. If only they were men instead of women we might succeed by killing a few when our chance came; but we can not do that."

"No, we can not do that. Yet I can see two possible ways for us to go. See if you can think of one."

Of course, I thought first of trying to slip away in the night. But, looking around me again, I saw that a number of women were squatting around a little fire between us and the one door. They looked as if they meant to stay awake until morning. I knew, too, that outside it was so dark we could not find our way through the jungle even if we could leave the house.

Then my eye settled on Jahy. She was watching me, and as I gazed at her she smiled. I thought of all that had passed since we first met. And I thought that since I had made her my wife I would abide by what I had done, if she wished to flee away from this place with me. Leaning out of my hammock, I asked in a low tone:

"*Jahy ahuh, apotare hahoh heiruhm?* New Moon, do you want to go away with me?"

She shook her head. Quietly but firmly she told me she would not leave this place, and that I had best not try to leave it either. Since I did not care enough for her to take her into my hammock the second time, she added, she now would wait and see what Amuy would do. I said no more, but lay back, feeling as if I had been slapped in the face.

'You have thought of one way, and it is not good," laughed Pedro. "If your Jahy will not run away with you tomorrow I am quite sure Tata would not go with me, so I shall not ask her. But unless I am mistaken in the ways of women we shall see something interesting in the morning. Now we may as well sleep."

WE DID sleep. I knew nothing at all until day came again. The first thing I heard was fat Amuy groaning because her head ached.

She was sitting up in her hammock, looking frowzy and stupid and calling for water. A younger women brought a jar of it, and she drank noisily and then poured the rest on her head. After that she swallowed a gourd of rum and seemed to feel better.

Every one else in the *maloca* had risen and was busy making the morning meal. We got up and stretched ourselves. I found my foot much better, and, though I still limped a little, I walked about quite easily. Amuy blinked at us in a puzzled way, then smiled thickly as she remembered us. But she said nothing until after she had eaten a big breakfast, taken another drink, and begun smoking one of those huge cigars.

By that time the rest of us also had eaten, and all the women gathered around us and the chief to learn what should be done.

Amuy stared steadily at us through the rank smoke she was making, and then asked some questions which showed she had forgotten most of what we had told her about ourselves. We answered them coolly, saying nothing further. We did not remind her of her warm welcome to us, nor tell her of my taking Jahy into my hammock. But she soon learned of this.

A bold-faced woman to whom we had paid no attention now shoved herself forward and pointing to me and Jahy as she talked, told how I had made myself the *erekuahn* of the Moon. She also argued that this must not be allowed; that she herself or any of the others had as much right to be my first wife as Jahy had.

Amuy scowled. But before she said anything Jahy spoke for herself.

She had a better right to me than any one else, she declared. She had been one of the first to find me, while this other woman had not even been in the party that caught us. She had attended to my wound when nobody else offered to do so, and I myself had preferred her above all the others and had taken her into my bed. Besides this, she had recently found and killed a *uira-para*, and our coming so soon after that showed that one of us was meant to be her man.

Perhaps you do not know the *uira-para, senhores*. No? Then let me explain. You may have noticed that the small bug-eating

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birds of our jungle usually do not travel singly, but come in sudden swarms which swiftly search the trees for insects and then are gone. The Indians all believe that these flocks are led by a mysterious little gray bird, the *uira-para*. And the Indian maidens—and many white girls too—believe that if they can get a *uira-para* and keep its smoke-dried little body it will draw many men to them, even as it draws the bird-swarms after it in life.

Jahy had one of these little birds, as she said. She drew it out from a fold of her *tanga* as she spoke, and insisted again that by all rights I was her *erekuahn*. Amuy looked rather sourly at it. Then she glanced at Tata.

Tata stepped forward and spoke. She too had a *uira-para*, which she had killed before Jahy found hers. And she had been leader of the party which found us, and she had given the deceptive *mutum* calls that brought us ashore. So she had the best right to take the first choice, she asserted. Yet she would not dispute Jahy's claim to me, for she did not want me. She would be the first mate of Pedro.

Amuy said nothing, but puffed away and looked at us both. Perhaps she waited for other women to speak, or perhaps she was only thinking. But other women spoke—indeed they did! A dozen of them at once began to argue, and others quickly joined in, each yelling and screeching to make herself heard. In no time at all the place was a riot of dispute.

Pedro laughed and shouted into my ear.

"I thought it would be so. It is easy for women to make an agreement but not so easy to keep it—especially about men. Are you not flattered to see them wrangle over you?"

"I might be if they were in love with me," I shouted back. "But not one of them really cares about us. They quarrel from selfishness, not from love. Each wants to beat the others by being first."

He nodded quickly and made some answer. But I lost it because I was watching the start of a fight.

One of the women, arguing with her mouth and both hands, shoved Tata roughly aside. Tata swung an elbow into that woman's stomach and knocked her backward. The woman sat down hard on the pot of rum, which tipped over and sent her sprawling. She bounded up, screeching in fury, and leaped at Tata. But then Amuy stopped it.

She lurched up between the two, and her solid bulk threw them both back. And in a tone that cracked like a gun-shot she commanded—

"Quiet!"

Tata and the other glared, but they obeyed. The others, too, stopped their noise so suddenly that it seemed still as the grave. Amuy was scowling, but I noticed that her eyes gleamed as if she were pleased by the trouble. I soon learned why.

"The men are mine!" she said.

We all stared. Nobody spoke.

"They are mine," she repeated. "They shall both be my mates. Later you shall have them in turn."

Black looks went among the women.

"No! That was not the agreement!" cried one.

"The agreement is broken!" Amuy answered instantly. "You have broken it yourselves. I, Amuy, am chief. It shall be as I say."

ANGRY murmurs followed. Jahy and Tata stood biting their lips, and their eyes burned. But no open revolt came, and Amuy, looking very well satisfied, turned to us.

"Smile, Lourenço and try to look pleased," whispered Pedro. It was hard for me to do so, but I managed to twist my face into a grin. He smiled also, and said:

"The matter is well arranged, Amuy. And now that it is settled, should we not have a celebration? Let us drink and dance the *pira-purasseya* and make merry."

All except Amuy heard this in sullen silence. But the chief, much pleased with herself, accepted the suggestion at once. It should be a day of feast, she said, and all the *cauim* they had should be brought out. At her command the women went slowly away, muttering to one another, and began to bring big clay jars from the end of the *maloca*. These were carried outside.

"If you think they will all drink themselves stupid you are mistaken," I grumbled. "There is not enough rum for that."

"I know it," he answered. "But there is enough to make us all quite lively. Be cheerful, comrade, and show how joyous you are at being made half-husband to this lovely lady."

I looked sharply at him and saw that he

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had something in his mind, so I said no more. Noticing that he took his rifle, I picked up mine, and we moved to the door. We were outside before any one noticed that we carried our guns. Then Amuy eyed us suspiciously and asked why we had brought our weapons.

Glancing down at his gun in a surprized way, Pedro said he was so accustomed to carrying it that he had taken it without thought. He dropped it carelessly beside the wall, and I followed his example. Then he stepped to a jar of *cauim*, dipped up a gourdful, and said:

"Girls, let us all drink and try to be satisfied with the arrangement that has been made. It is not what you agreed on, and in my own country we should do differently; but you know best what you wish to do."

"What would you do in your country?" asked a big woman.

"If two women were to be the wives of many men they would go first to the strongest fighters," he told her. "But of course you are only women, and so you can not settle it in that way."

The women, all proud of their hunting and fighting ability, looked at him and at one another with faces hardening. They drank in silence, pouring the liquor down their throats in a way not at all gentle or womanly. Before Amuy's fat brain sensed the feeling his words caused he added:

"Now let us form the circle. Who will be the first fish?"

The "fish" in this *pira-purasseya* or fish-dance, as you *senhores* know, is the person who stands in the center of the ring, answers questions, and finally rushes at the others circling around and tries to break through. If the fish escapes, then the one who let him out has to become the fish. And now no girl wanted to be fish. They were not in the mood for play.

"Then I will be fish," he said. "And since a fish does not like to be dry, let us all drink again."

Some of them smiled at this, and all dipped deep into the jars. With another gourdful apiece under their smooth skins they formed a ring, joined hands in a rather unwilling way, and marched around my partner. Because of my lameness, I stood outside the circle.

"Fish, what kind of fish are you?" called some one, according to the custom.

"I am no fish, but a lizard," was his answer. It was a good one, for he was tall and slender.

"What do you here, lizard?" asked somebody else.

"I came to warm myself at the fire—*tata*."

"And does the fire comfort you?"

"No. I can not reach it because I am drowned by the rain—*amuy*."

There was laughter at this, but it sounded unpleasant. And a voice called—

"Why do you not push the rain aside to reach the fire?"

"Because the rain is too thick."

This time the laughter was very loud. Amuy looked ugly. And she looked still uglier as the other women began to sing of the lizard which came seeking the fire but was swallowed up by the thick, heavy rain. But before she could say or do anything Pedro dashed toward me, broke through the circle, and slapped my shoulder.

"Be the fish now," he said rapidly. "Do you see my plan?"

I nodded, told the women I was next fish, and suggested another drink. After that the circle started again, and they asked me what sort of fish I was. As I am rather broad, I said—

"I am not a fish but a turtle."

"And why does the turtle come here?"

"I am here because I followed a *uira-para*."

"And what did the *uira-para* tell you?"

"It said that here I should find the new moon."

"Do you like the new moon?" asked Jahy herself.

"I like it very well. But the wretched rain has come between us."

There was silence. Then one said—

"A turtle should not fear the rain."

"The turtle does not fear the rain," I denied. "Yet the rain prevents the sun from shining on us."

A low murmur of agreement went around. But some woman called—

"The rain will pass."

"How do I know it will pass? It may hold me from the moon until I am dead."

Again came a murmur. Then they sang of the rain which kept the sun from them, and said the rain must not last too long. The singing had a defiant note. And the next "fish" carried the defiance much farther.

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That fish was Jahy. She caught my eye, moved her head, and when I approached she broke the circle and let me through. Then, after another drink of that fiery rum, she took her place in the ring.

This time Amuy would not march. Hard-faced, bad-eyed, she stood glowering at us and all the rest. The women ignored her and marched around as before.

Asked what she was, Jahy answered loudly—

"I am a sting-ray."

"And what seek you here?"

"A turtle with a hurt foot."

"But your turtle," some woman laughed, "is lost in the rain."

"It does not matter. The rain must give him up."

At that, all looked hard at Amuy.

"But what if the rain does not give him up?" called Tata.

"I am a sting-ray!"

"Is your sting sharp?"

"It is sharp and long. When I sting, I kill!"

She said it clearly and boldly. Again all looked at Amuy. And Amuy stood staring, her mouth open, as if she could not believe she really heard such a threat.

"But perhaps the turtle will learn to love the rain," some one said mockingly.

"Then the turtle will die!" Jahy cried. And now every one looked at me.

I said nothing. The circle moved on, and this time they did not sing. Neither did any one speak. Somehow the tread of those women reminded me of a war-party swinging out on a death-trail.

"Lourenço, I think your new moon is growing full," said Pedro. Watching Jahy, I saw that the ugly recklessness of drink showed in her face. Then I studied Tata also.

"You are right," I agreed. "I do not admire the moon as much as I did. And I think also that your fire will soon break out into open flame."

Tata did look dangerous. So did all the rest. Between their anger over the selfishness of Amuy, the powerful *cauim* they had drunk, and our goading answers, they were in a bad mood. Storm was near.

THE storm nearly broke when Jahy threw herself at the others in her attempt to leave the ring. Perhaps it was accident, perhaps not; but she sprang at the bold woman who had first disputed her claim to me, striking her so hard that both fell to the ground.

As Jahy rose the other woman screamed in rage and clawed at her legs. Jahy also screamed. Then she kicked the other in the stomach, kicked her again in the mouth, and jumped on her face with both feet.

Some one pushed Jahy away. Several others jumped between her and the woman on the ground. Jahy fought all of them, but they overpowered her and dragged her back. The other woman arose in a dazed way and staggered toward the *maloca*.

"Kill! Kill!" she muttered as she neared us. And we knew she was going for a weapon.

We stepped before her and blocked her.

"You will not kill Jahy!" I declared loudly.

At that the others all crowded up. Amuy came shoving roughly through them.

"Who talks of killing?" she demanded.

"This woman says she will kill," I answered. "There will be no killing."

With an evil gleam in her eyes Amuy squinted at me, at Pedro, at Jahy. And then, partly drunk with rum and wholly drunk with rage, she said hoarsely:

"There will be killing. The rain may be heavy, the rain may be thick, but the rain rules. The lizard and the turtle who would end the rain shall die—and the sting-ray also. Kill these men! Kill!"

The women surged toward us. Then, realizing what that command meant, they halted. Pedro spoke.

"You see how it is. Rather than give us to you, this woman would have you kill us. Dead men can not be your mates. Shall we be killed?"

"No!" rang the answer. Instantly he went on.

"No. And you see what sort of chief you have. A chief should rule for the welfare of the whole tribe. A chief who rules only for herself is no chief. Why do you follow such a leader? There are others among you far more worthy. Here is one!" He pointed to Tata. "Are you weak, watery women who should obey the rain? You are women of red blood and fire! Then let the fire rule!"

A shrill yell went up.

"Tata! Tata! A real chief!"

Tata was not slow. She leaped forward, her eyes flashing.

"You hear!" she snapped at Amuy. "I am chief!"

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The Fire and the Rain faced each other. Then the storm broke in earnest. With one screech of fury Amuy heaved herself at Tata. The tall girl leaped aside and tripped her. Amuy dropped heavily. Tata jumped on her as Jahy had jumped on the other woman. But her feet slipped off that greasy skin, and she fell.

Others sprang on them both. In no time there was a kicking, clawing, biting heap of women struggling on the ground and knocking other women off their legs.

Out of this heap rose Amuy, bloody-nosed and blubbering. Head down, she plowed through the rest toward the *maloca* door, howling—

"I will kill!"

Then Tata fought her way up and plunged after her. Both disappeared inside the house.

The others swarmed after them, fighting madly to squeeze in at the small opening and get their weapons. Before half of them were through it more fighting screeches sounded inside, and those still around the door strove even harder to get in. Soon all had jammed themselves through and thrown themselves into the riot, and only we two men stood in the open air.

PEDRO strode to the wall, snatched up our rifles, and ran for the jungle. I followed, and I did not let my lameness slow my steps. Through the bush we sprinted toward the river.

"Over here!" he panted, halting beside a twisted tree and whirling me to the right. We squirmed through the tangle as fast as we could, stumbled out at last at the edge of the water, and found the canoe lying snugly in a tiny cove where he had fastened it. Shoving out, we grabbed our paddles. Then I sat back and laughed.

"We had best move out of arrow-shot before we laugh too hard, comrade," he said. "Listen!"

Out of the confused noise of fight away behind us grew sharp cries of rage which quickly became more loud and clear. Some one had found that we were gone, and pursuers were rushing after us. We were up a narrow *enseada*, and the point where we had first landed was beyond us. Until we cleared that point we could easily be shot, and we had little doubt that we would be. Stroking hard, we slid away toward the open river.

We got away none too soon. Before we passed the point of the *restinga* baffled screams rang out from the little cove which we had just left, and arrows plunged into the water close behind us. And when we were out on the slow current of the Jurua more screams and more arrows came from the spot where Pedro had gone ashore yesterday to seek the false *mutum* birds. But the missiles fell short, and we rested on our paddles and looked back.

At the edge of the bush we saw faces twisted by fury and drink, but whose they were we could not tell. Voices shrieked to us to come back and be killed.

"We thank you," called Pedro, "but we would rather return to our weeping wives and suffering children—ha ha ha! *Adeos*, girls! Kiss Amuy for us!"

And we waved our hands and went away from there.

Whether they followed us in canoes I do not know. We had seen no boats there, and perhaps they had none except the old, worm-eaten dugouts in which their mothers had come there years ago. However that may be, we never saw them again.

And let me tell you, *senhores*, I do not want to see them again. Wild women may be interesting, but I do not want to live with girls who smoke suffocating cigars, drink rum that would paralyze a tapir, and kick off the faces of those who anger them. I would rather be among the snakes and jaguars and man-eating savages of my own Javary jungle, where I can be safe.

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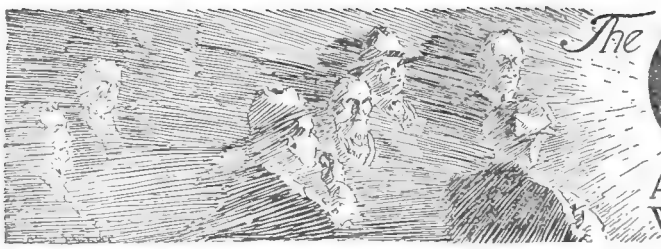

The Camp-Fire

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

NEVER very much time goes by without some of you writing in to ask when we're going to have some more *Sled Wheeler* stories. "The Crook and the Doctor" was published during our magazine's first year and others have followed at long intervals. I wish we could give you more of them, but Dr. Cochrane is a busy practising physician, which means that his time for writing is very limited indeed. At least our magazine has had all there are.

All the others have been city tales. Here are a few words from Dr. Cochrane about this one, laid in the West:

East Dorset, Vermont.

The plot and most of the characters are fiction but, since you always welcome gossip about stories, I may presume to bother you with the statement that some of the most improbable features were based on fact. For instance—Hibernian instance—I left out one detail in the killing of the two renegade Indians. The hero chased the last one miles up a sandy gully, caught him when both were at the last gasp and clubbed him to death with his revolver-butt. Then on his return to camp he found that all during that Marathon he had had a shot left in his gun and could have dropped the redskin at any time. This from my notes.—JOHN I. COCHRANE.

HERE is a letter concerning the Custer fight that takes decided issue with some of the accounts previously heard at our Camp-Fire:

Philadelphia.

Almost every time I put on my slippers and toast my shins at the Camp-Fire, my serenity is disturbed by reading some weird statements anent the Custer Massacre. The issue of December eighteenth was especially disturbing. As a young man I have visited the scene of the last fight, have talked with Army officers who were in the campaign under Reno, have read the minutes of the courtmartial that gave Reno his coat of whitewash, have heard from the lips of the first comers after the fight exactly the condition of the bodies and positions they were in as the running fight progressed. As this was less than twenty years after the General's death, I feel that my information is at least free of legend and supposition.

THE late Lyman D. Gilbert of Harrisburg, Pa., who defended Reno at his trial for cowardice and conduct unbecoming an officer, published a pamphlet giving the testimony of the various witnesses. Reno was acquitted but went through the remainder of his Army career practically in Coventry. Many years afterward, one of the members of the court made the statement to me that the acquital was for the good of the service. It would be interesting reading for Mr. Little who wrote so authoritatively on the impossibility of rendering Custer any assistance.

Now as for Rain-in-the-Face. In 1873 or thereabouts, Rain-in-the-Face was imprisoned by Charlie Custer for some violation of the regulations governing the reservation. Rain-in-the-Face was terribly humiliated. That night he escaped and sent back word to Captain Custer that he would cut out his heart. The body of Charlie Custer was found stripped and mutilated and on the forehead was cut the mark of Rain-in-the Face. The body of General Custer was not scalped or mutilated. The correspondent of the Milwaukee *Sentinel*, whose clipping was published, has evidently mixed up the two officers.

I have heard hundreds of stories of the death of General Custer, but this is the first time the name of Rain-in-the-Face has been named as the Indian who gave General Custer "the long sleep." Many have been cited as claiming to have fired the shot, but the Indians who were there invariably say that when he fell there was a fusilade of shots that made it impossible to distinguish one from the other. It must be remembered that General Custer was not the last man to die. This fact was shown by the bodies which were scattered from where the fight began to where the last man fell. Judging from this, the general was killed about four hours after the action began.—EDGAR A. CUSTER.

IN CONNECTION with his story, "Clothes and the Man," in the last issue, G. A. Wells wrote me an interesting letter as to the real facts behind the tale. I wanted to pass it on to you but he had marked it as not for publication, sc I picked out one small piece and asked whether it would be O K to publish that, expressing my regret that you couldn't all have a look at the whole letter. Being a good member of Camp-Fire, he did better than I'd asked and rewrote the whole letter, making only a few small changes, and here it is:

New Albany, Indiana.

The *Logan Cole* of this story was a man who was pointed out to me in a gambling joint at Tucson, Arizona, a number of years ago. I heard his name at the time, but have long since forgotten it. He had at one time been a member of the Texas Rangers. My informant told me that in a single-handed

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gun duel with four Mexicans he laid them all low. Naturally he was of great interest to me, a tenderfoot, and I looked him over carefully. I was rather disappointed to find that he didn't at all come up to my idea of what such a man should be. He looked too quiet and modest for that sort of thing. At the time I saw him he was playing twenty-dollar gold pieces at a faro game.

THOSE were the days when most men carried their six-guns openly and saloons and gambling halls had no front walls. I remember well the Eagle Saloon at Tucson. One could find almost any kind of gambling layout there. I remember one night seeing the marshal, badge and all, sitting on the high stool looking out a faro game where a blanketed Indian stood winning gold coins as fast as the dealer turned the cards from his deal-box. It was also in that place that I saw "Cowboy" Johnson, a rather famous man of that day and section. He was inclined to be sporty and at the time I saw him he wore a twenty-carat diamond in his shirt bosom and a Mexican hat with a torn of silver trimmings on it.

Even fifteen years ago the West was rather wild and woolly in a good many spots, particularly south of Colorado. I saw open gambling, gun-toters and gun-fighters from the Rio Grande to Montana, and from the mountains as far east as Kansas City. I myself packed a six-gun while in Oklahoma, then Indian Territory, but more to play "heap bad medicine" than from utility, let me truthfully admit. Doubtless a boy with a stick could have run me forty miles.

WHILE working a night telegraph trick for a railroad running down through Indian Territory I was close enough to a train hold-up to hit it with a brick almost. The hold-up occurred a short distance from Sallisaw, I. T. Two of the gang who turned the trick came through my place from Ft. Smith, going to Sallisaw by train and getting their horses and meeting their friends at Sallisaw. Had I known at the time I saw them I couldn't have been seen for the dust. Thus timid hath nature made me. Since the West has become civilized, however, they take it away from you out there à la Wall Street.

And speaking of Wall Street reminds me that New York isn't so tame. At least it usen't to be. I recall to mind very distinctly one night on the Bowery I came within an ace of giving up the ghost to a Dago push-cart man who tried to shuffle me off with a fruit knife with a blade forty feet long. At least it looked that long to me then. And he would have sent me to my fathers, too, had I not exhibited a speed that even to this day should be the talk of the town. When I stopped I was on the Battery looking for a place where I could jump over into Brooklyn. Another time a good citizen of Gotham tried to hold me up at Seventy-ninth and Riverside. He didn't catch me.

I USED to know a detective by the name of John Murphy from Mulberry Street, the American Scotland Yard. John often conducted me about to see the sights, and of course he had license to take me where the average man can't go. With him I went into my first hop-joint and took a whiff at the little pill. Oh you burnt rubber! I whiffed again in Frisco and at Tokio, Japan. I am satisfied I shall never get the habit.

One night John and I visited a place in Chatham Square. Somebody slipped dope in my beer (yes, it was that long ago) and when I came to I found myself in bed in a little hotel in the neighborhood of One Hundred and Tenth Street. John explained next time I saw him that he wanted to show me how easy it is to put it over on the innocents. Ever after when I called for a drink I watched the game from spiggot to mouth. It was a good lesson.

If *Logan Cole* is sitting anywhere about this Camp-Fire and was playing faro in the Eagle Saloon at Tucson one night some time in January, 1905, let him hop up and tell the crowd about the four men he killed that time.—G. A. WELLS.

THIS hoop-snake argument. I'm going to stand out from under, taking the ground that both sides are right. Whatever happens, don't blame me. I used to think there wasn't no sech animal, but it's no longer safe to think.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Pardon me for horning in where I have no business, but in reading "Camp-Fire" I see that some one has proclaimed themselves a Doubting Thomas, in disputing the statement of Comrade Quimby, and I expect I will be doubted as well, but here goes just the same.

WHEN I was a kid I had a dog (just plain dawg, and yellow; you know the species). Well, I took this dog to the country with me the Summer I was ten. We lived in Jackson, Michigan, then, and where I went was about fifteen miles north of Jackson, near Pleasant Lake. One day while my mother, sister and I were sitting on the porch I heard my dog coming up the lane ky-yi-ing to beat the band and thought as usual he had seen his shadow and became frightened at it. Now the porch was about two feet above the ground and the front of it was boarded down to about a foot of the ground.

In front of the house was a lawn about twenty feet wide and running the full width of the house with the land coming in at the left front corner of the lawn. Now as I say, we were all three sitting on the porch when we heard the dog yelling in the lane and in a few seconds he hit the edge of the lawn and in less than that he was under the porch. But what nearly caused the death of all of us from fright was what was back of the dog about eight or ten feet. All I could make out at first was what appeared to be an animated hoop, but mother yelled "Hoop-snake!" and fainted, and my sister beat me into the house by about a half a jump.

NOW this snake rolled like a hoop with its tail in its mouth, and when it strikes it appears to let go of its tail and strike tail first like an arrow. This one struck too high and too late to get the dog, for when my uncle went out front to investigate he found the snake's tail stuck about half an inch in the pine boarding below the floor. This snake was a gray in color, measured well over six feet and the end of its tail was like a solid bone for about three inches and was covered with very fine barbs, like those on a fish-hook, only a good deal smaller.

So why people laugh and say there is no such thing as a hoop-snake is more than I can guess, but it must have been serious, and the dog must have

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thought he was in the wrong for he never came out from under the porch for three days.

Hoping you will publish this in justice to Comrade Quimby and for the general edification of the Doubting Thomases.—JOHN (JACK) SHEARER.

OUR mistake. In Hugh Pendexter's "A Scout for Virginia," page 117 of our Mid-December issue, is the clause "since Colonel Cressup massacred his people at Baker's Bottom." Mr. Pendexter had written "since Greathouse and Baker massacred his people," etc.

The story was first set in the smaller type we used for a while, then, when we changed back to the larger type we now use, it had to be set over again. Somewhere in the process a proof-reader in the composing-room marked in the margin of a galley-proof a query as to changing "Greathouse and Baker" to "Colonel Cressup." Later, one of the staff, seeing this query, went carefully into the matter and decided, with some justification, that the context called for the change suggested and made it. He was wrong, of course, in changing any point of fact without getting the author's O. K. Also, in any case, neither he nor the proof-room had any justification for the spelling "Cressup," which should have been "Cresap," as elsewhere in the story.

OF COURSE a reader pounced on this distortion of American history and naturally enough blamed Mr. Pendexter for it. We explained to him and I'm going into the matter at such length because Mr. Pendexter is particularly entitled to a clean slate as to points in American history. There have been millions of chances for slips, large and small, in the many historical novels and stories he has published in our magazine, and, to the best of my memory, not once has any reader caught him in any slip.

And, believe me, when any author "gets by" *Adventure* readers with any kind of slip he deserves a medal. Among "our people" are experts on almost any subject you can mention, from advanced science to the customs of beach-combers and aborigines, and if a writer goes wrong in their field they can and do nail him and nail him quick and hard. Which is a great help to us poor editors who can't possibly know everything about everything. Just as, in this case, Dr. H. C. Yarrow, formerly connected with the Smithsonian Institution (who gave us some valuable data on the Gila monster) happened to be entirely familiar with the much discussed question of Cresap's connection—or lack of connection—with this massacre of Indians and promptly called our attention to our slip.

I'm glad it was our mistake instead of Hugh Pendexter's, for his record as a reliable authority on early American history is far too good to be spoiled. Incidentally, in his Camp-Fire talk in connection with this story he brought out this very point of Cresap's not being the guilty party. There is no longer much point in saying "The drinks are on us," but that's the idea.

THE following from one of our old-timers of the West will be listened to with interest:

Houston, Texas.

I have read so many different tales about "Billy the Kid" (Wm. Boring) that I thought it might be worth while to write "Camp-Fire" some things that I know.

I WENT to New Mexico in 1879, arrived at Las Vegas when the A. T. & S. F. first got there. I prospected about a year in the vicinity of Las Vegas and when the White Oaks excitement developed I went there. After prospecting several months in Nogal Cañon I went back to White Oaks and leased the White Oaks *Golden Era*, a weekly paper, published that about a year and then started the *Lincoln County Leader*, publishing that paper in company with Major Caffrey, some two years. This was in 1882-83 and 84, about the time Billy the Kid was doing most of his killing.

I was going down White Oaks Avenue one night and had just got into the glare of the lights of Bill Hudgen's saloon when some one from the corner opposite fired across the street, and I dodged. Some one yelled.

"Go on Paul, I ain't shooting at you. I want that other Dutch son of a ——."

It was Billy the Kid shooting at Jim Redmond, who was a deputy-sheriff and had a warrant for Billy.

Next morning a posse was organized and Billy was pursued. During the pursuit Johnny Hudgen was shot at by Billy and the bullet struck the pommel of his saddle, a pretty close shave.

BILLY was pursued past the Picarilla Mountains and fortified himself in an old cabin. He was surrounded but would not give up. He asked that Jim Carlisle be sent to him to have a talk with him. Jim went and was with Billy quite a while. What they talked about will never be known, for after a while Jim came out of the cabin and started back to the rest of the posse. He had not gone more than fifty yards when Billy shot him in the back and Jim dropped dead.

BILLY was captured some time after by Sheriff Pat Garrett and taken to Lincoln, the county seat. Was tried, convicted and sentenced to death. The jail at Lincoln was a poor affair and two men,

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Bob Black and Bob Ollinger, were put over Billy as guards. Billy was kept, most of the time, on the second floor of the court-house. One day one of the guards went across the street to Ben Ellis' to dinner and the other remained to guard Billy. Billy's dinner was sent over to him and his guard, Bob Black, loosened one of his (Billy's) handcuffs so that he could eat with comfort. Watching his opportunity, Billy struck Bob over the head with the dangling handcuff, knocking him insensible, then he took Bob's gun and shot him.

Billy then went into a room adjoining and armed himself completely. Bob Ollinger, hearing the shot, went across the street and had just got to the foot of the stairs when Billy fired and killed him. Billy then compelled a native to get him a horse and he lit out for Mexico, getting completely away.

BILLY was not heard of for some time. Pat Garrett had information that Billy was stuck on a Mexican girl at Pete Maxwell's ranch, at Ft. Sumner and Pat kept informed as to what was going on at Maxwell's. At last he got the information that Billy was at Ft. Sumner, and he went over and arrived at Maxwell's after dark. Pat went immediately to Pete's bedroom and was sitting on the side of Maxwell's bed, talking to Pete, when Billy came into the room, a candle in one hand and a knife in the other. When he got in the door he heard voices and said "*Quien es? Quien es?*"

("Who is that, who is that?") Pat took no chances, but shot Billy dead before he had a chance to defend himself.

The above is the account of Billy the Kid's death as told me by Pat Garrett himself.—PAUL F. WAGNER.

AN IMPOSTER has been impersonating Courtney Ryley Cooper and Jack Boyle and these two writers have sent a printed circular of warning to editors. They describe him as six feet tall, long hair brushed back from forehead and strongly resembling Raymond Hitchcock in mannerism, cast of countenance and general build, especially in size and shape of mouth and chin. Name not known. The same or a similar imposter has been reported by Henry Herbert Knibbs as impersonating him, and you will remember that not many months ago some man, perhaps the same one, posed as Talbot Mundy in New Orleans while Mr. Mundy himself was in Arabia.

The Cooper-Boyle man is reported as having worked in Los Angeles, Pittsburg, Texas and the South in general, passing bad checks etc. By the time this reaches you he, or they, will undoubtedly have picked out still other writers to impersonate, so it would be just as well for all of us to take a careful look at any one anywhere who claims to be some well known writer and tries to raise money on the claim without adequate identification.

CONCERNING his story in this issue, a few words from Thomson Burtis:

Godman Field, Camp Knox,
Stithton, Kentucky.

The climax of the story was suggested by an accident I saw happen at Kelly Field. A radio ship, its antenna stringing out two hundred feet behind, passed at right angles to another ship. The wire, which is invisible in the air, caught the other propeller and shattered it, as per the story. The only actual difference between the story and the real happening is that in the story, inasmuch as the intent to shatter the propeller was deliberate, I have put both ships flying parallel. I believe, and the flyers I have talked with agree with me, that the stunt mentioned in the story could be done by an expert airman about once in five times. These propellers, due to their terrific speed—the tip goes about nine miles a minute, I think—are easily broken in the air. A bird will do it; a bad rainstorm will take great splinters from the edges; and a little rock picked up from the ground in warming up will dent a propeller half an inch. The De Haviland propeller in its course rotates with the uppermost tip at least two feet above the level of the top wing. All of which technical and boresome stuff I mention to assure you that the story in its main incidents is well founded.

Everything else in the story really happened at one time or another—the flying part, I mean. Those records mentioned—the parachute jump, the twenty-six-hundred-mile trip, the altitude record, etc. are all bona fide, with names changed. And a cadet actually did steal a ship from Kelly Field and fly it to Laredo one day in 1918.—THOMSON BURTIS.

NOT old enough to be an old-timer but old enough to be a real product of the real West as it is to-day. Will some of you give him the words of the song he wants?

Buffalo Gap, South Dakota.

As I have been a reader for quite a while I thought I would try and break a hail to the Camp-Fire. May I sit down and enjoy a smoke with you old-timers? Maybe, though, you don't want a short-horn in your herd.

THE old-timers around here don't seem exactly in love with Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill and others. They say that Eastern writers throw too much bull about them.

They consider Wild Bill an excellent gunman. My uncle knew him when he was sheriff of Ellis County, Kansas. To use my uncle's words: "He was judge, jury and executioner all in one. His victims were buried on Boot Hill at Hays City."

My uncle was with Buffalo Bill when he was furnishing buffalo meat for the U. P. Railway. He also knew Buck Taylor when he was king of the cowboys. Does any one know whether Taylor is alive now or not?

I WAS born close to Hays City. My grandfather ran one of the first saloons in Ellis, Kansas. My aunt was abducted by Indians when she was four years old, but some of her father's friends caught the Indians and brought her back. I have ridden trail ever since I was old enough to

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straddle a bronc and never had any worse adventures than to be bit with a rattlesnake. Have chased with dogies, got thrown from a horse and knocked nutty et cetera, but am only eighteen years old now so may hit a real adventure before I die.

Old-timers around here say Sitting Bull was a bad Injun. Red Cloud was well liked by many old-timers.

Would some of the bunch send me the song "They Call Me the Orphan in the Dreary Black Hills?" I know the tune but just one verse of the song.

This little burg (Buffalo Gap) used to be a wild and wooly little town with fifteen dance-halls, several saloons and a gang of outlaws (Doc Middleton) operating close by. It was burnt out three times and now is just a small place.—ROLAND GUYER.

AT A Camp-Fire in the Fall I gave you a letter from a reader calling me a deliberate thief, absolutely dishonest, disloyal to my trust, etc., for publishing a story by Talbot Mundy in *Romance* instead of *Adventure*. Also stories by other writers he said belonged to *Adventure*, though of the four named one has never appeared in *Adventure* and another not for years past. The letter would have been insulting beyond endurance if it had not been for the writer's fine loyalty to our magazine and if it hadn't been a bit amusing in its vehemence. I answered it at the time with facts and they have apparently satisfied everybody as to the general case, but I've had several more letters kicking because a Mundy story appeared in *Romance*.

Let's settle this Mundy matter. Since my general statement of the case doesn't seem to have satisfied all of you, I'll give the particular details, although to do so I must go into other people's affairs, which I avoided doing in the previous statement. The Mundy case boils right down to this—if you hadn't got that story in *Romance* you wouldn't have got it in any magazine. You'd have had to wait and pay $1.75 or whatever it is for it in book form.

IT HAPPENED that, for reasons which had nothing to do with *Adventure*, *Romance* or the company that publishes them and over which we had no control, this story had to be published in book form by a certain date. Ordinarily there is no trouble in arranging a book date that does not interfere with magazine publication. This case was an exception and we consider the Bobbs, Merrill Co. entirely justified in setting that particular date. So did Mr. Mundy. The necessity was an emergency arising after our purchase of the story. It was impossible to get it into *Adventure* before the date set, even by disarranging the schedule very seriously. *Adventure* was in type too far ahead, and there were other dates that had to be met. It was hard enough even to get it into *Romance* before that date—meant the destroying of a good many carefully laid plans and the doing and undoing of considerable work. But we managed to do it and thereby to give readers of the two magazines a chance to get it in magazine form instead of having to wait and pay more for a book. In return for which I'm called "thief," etc.

So there you are. It couldn't have been in *Adventure*. Was it, then, criminal to print it in *Romance*?

WELL, as I've hinted before, an editor has a hard time. It's all right, for example, to get letters from readers saying "I like the stories by A, B and C, but why in —— do you print those rotten stories by X, Y and Z?" and right along with them letters from other readers saying "Can't you get X, Y and Z to write more stories for us? Put them in in place of those stories by A, B and C, which are distinctly below our magazine's standard and clear out of its field anyway." That's all right, for nearly always there are a lot more letters on one side than on the other and this helps us to judge how the *majority* of our readers feel on a given case. We very much want our readers to tell us which stories they like or don't like. How else can we find out how to make the magazine suit them better?

But abuse and ugly words are another matter.

NOW 99.$\frac{55}{100}$% of you need not read what follows, but I hope to high heaven that the other .$\frac{45}{100}$% read it. I worked previously on half a dozen other magazines and I've never known so genuinely friendly a family of readers as *Adventure* has, but among so many there are always a few who make a business of suspecting the worst and of talking the worst they know how. I want to make a suggestion to this .$\frac{45}{100}$%: State your case by all means, but it isn't necessary and it doesn't get a fellow anywhere to use abuse and to be as rotten nasty as he can in stating it. It may make him feel proud and puffed up to be insulting to a

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nan hundreds or thousands of miles away, ut, if he'll just stop to think of it, any silly ss can mouth abuse. He hasn't nearly so nuch cause to feel proud as has that other ittle animal we call a skunk.

Also, it makes him and his abuse sound ll the sillier when he's roaring around bout something he doesn't know anything whatsoever about. Which is generally the case.

I like straight-from-the-shoulder talk and most of you know that I don't side-step honest criticism no matter how plainly or bruskly stated, but then almost every man jack of you with whom I've had dealings is a real fellow and doesn't run off at the mouth with abuse when ordinary decent speech serves the purpose just as well. You give me a fair deal, and more than a fair deal, always, and, well, I guess that's why I'm telling you my troubles and speaking my mind to those few others who are different and haven't developed above their vocal organs. It's taken me ten years to get irritated enough to swat those flies, so maybe you won't grudge me this much of our space.

WHENEVER any one gives us a remedy for snake-bite I quickly make a noise to the effect that we want to hear all these remedies we can but that the magazine never endorses any of them. If I knew enough about snake-bite cures to do that, there'd be no need of discussing the subject, for I could just tell you all about it and close the discussion. But I don't know all about them, or even very much about them, so I open my mouth only to proclaim my lack of authority and to disclaim any responsibility.

This comrade talks about acid in the blood. I'm sorry to say I do know considerable about acid in the blood, in a general and personal way, but I don't get any fun out of talking about it. However, I'm ready to believe anything bad that any one says about it.

Here are the simple facts in regard to rattlesnake bite. The rattlesnake poison is an acid and acts on the iron in the blood, causing the blood to coagulate.

ANY one knows that an alkali in excess neutralizes an acid. When any one is bitten by a rattlesnake all they have to do is to use common bicarbonate of soda, the common soda used in cooking. Just pile it on the bite and wet it. It will turn green. Then take it off and put on more and wet that. Do this three times. Each time it will turn green, but never has been known to turn green more than three times.

That is all there is to it. The patient only feels a little sick a few seconds after being bitten. The soda, or alkali, must be put on as soon as possible after being bitten. After the soda treatment the side of the person on which the bite is, will turn spotted like the snake, and remain so for a few days.

I KNOW of many cases where soda was used, both on men and on animals, and not one case failed. Where there are poisonous snakes one should have some soda and water along.

Any of the alkalies will do, carbonate of soda (common washing-soda,) bicarbonate of soda (used in cooking), ammonia or concentrated lye. Fresh wood-ashes and a little water furnishes lye too, but the bicarbonate of soda is white and you can see when the poison is gone by there being no green color.

I am only a common woodchopper but I know how to cure a snake-bite. Of course if the fang enters a large vein, then an alkali should be injected immediately into the same vein, and a large dose of soda taken internally. Persons who eat baking-powder biscuits three times a day and don't use much acid will not be affected by the bite like those whose systems are intensely acid, like wine-drinkers and people who eat yeast-bread and pickles and vinegar.—C. S. ACKEN.

DON'T forget that the original paintings of *Adventure* covers are for sale to the highest bidder.

Send in your bid any time. Bids will be compared and paintings sent out January 1st and July 1st of each year. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover will be considered. Many of the cover paintings have been disposed of but most of those used in recent years are still on hand.

THE old-timer readers among you already know *Yasmini* and in Talbot Mundy's serial now running will have an added interest in learning for the first time who and what she was, where she came from and all about the early life of almost the only woman character who has made a big hit with the readers of our magazine. Incidentally, Mr. Mundy's first title for the story was "In the Days of Her Youth."

I think I told you that Talbot Mundy spent the greater part of 1920 in Arabia and Palestine. He was there on other work but that work gave him exceptional opportunity for gathering material and local color for stories and he made the most of it. You'll be glad to hear that we already have the first two of a series of novelettes laid in this exceedingly turbulent and interesting section of the globe.—A. S. H.

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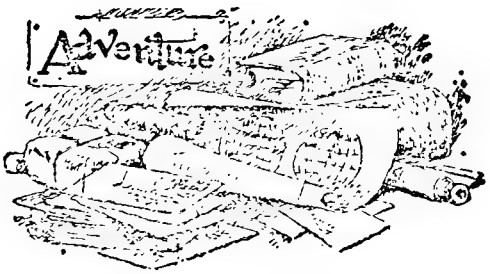

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THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

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In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that*

WILL BUY: 1915; 1916; 1917; 1918, complete. Must be in good condition. State price.—Address R. C. MACKENZIE, 258 Massachusetts Ave., Boston, Mass.

WILL SELL: Mid-July, 1918 to Mid-April, 1020. Forty-two copies. State price.—Address R. H. WILLIAMS, 336 East 24th St., New York City.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 513 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for Ask *Adventure*, but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. Ask *Adventure* covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1305 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 West Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Melbourne Beach, Florida. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border States of old Mexico; Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern: Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, 381 Broadway Street, San Francisco, Cal. Covering Lower California and that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce, business and general conditions.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Covering southeastern Ontario and the Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minnesota. Covering Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel. *The shortest, quickest and cheapest way to get into this north country.*

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Carmel, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

19. North American Snow Countries. Part 7
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

20. North American Snow Countries Part 8
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America. Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

26. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

27. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan; commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

30. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering **Morocco**; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

32. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Building, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. Africa Part 5. Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN. The Adventurers' Club, 8 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. Climatic conditions, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, mines and minerals, opportunities for employment, direct shipping routes from United States of America, general information covering living conditions, travel and opportunities.

34. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

35. South Sea Islands of French Oceania
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E Street, San Rafael, California. Covering Tahiti and the Society Islands, the Paumotu or Pearl Islands, and the Marquesas. Geography, natives, history, language, customs, travel, equipment, climate, produce, trading, pearl-diving, living conditions and expenses; sports, vanilla and coconut culture.

36. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the **Ask *Adventure*** editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agrl., Com.; and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents—in stamps NOT attached*)

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Spring Jobs in the Southwestern Oil-Fields

SOME oil-wells, in the Southwest at any rate, shut down during the Winter months, but beginning with the Spring months the fields take to running full force again. So be forehanded if you want to get in on the ground floor:

Question:—"Can you please give me any information concerning the conditions in the Texas and Oklahoma oil-fields? I am a pipe-fitter and am 23 years old.

I would like to try the oil-fields, but as I know nothing about this territory I would greatly appreciate any information you may give me. Can you give me some idea of the wages, climate and living conditions?"—M. A. McClain, Altoona, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Whitcaker:—The oil streak in Oklahoma begins at the northeastern part of the State and continues toward the southwest, where it enters Texas and continues southwestward. In Oklahoma some of the new fields that are recovering from their post-boom days are Tulsa, Ada, Okmulgee, Nowata, Duncan and Healdton. The fields of Texas are Burk Burnett, Ranger, Strawn, Desdemona, Brownwood and Thrall. A new field has been opened in Pecos County near Fort Stockton in west Texas which may be worth while looking over.

As you are experienced in pipe fitting there would not be much trouble in your landing a good job. The wages have been from $12.50 to $18 per day for skilled mechanics. Can't say what they will be, of course.

The climate is warm for at least ten months in the year, and the other months are not very cold except in the extreme northern part of the Panhandle.

The living conditions around the oil-fields have been somewhat expensive owing to lack of transportation and accommodations for living-quarters. These conditions have been greatly improved during the past year, so that there is not much difference in the prices of such in the oil sections and in other parts of the country.

Men have been scarce in all sections of the State for two or three years. The high wages in the cities have called the men there from the rural sections, so that farming-land has lain idle in all sections. There are a large number of men returning to their former homes in the country, so that the demand for help is not as great as it was.

Diamond-Mining in Transvaal

IT TAKES know-how, just as anything else does, except maybe throwing cold hands:

Question:—"I am anxious to obtain some information as to the advisability of a trip to the Transvaal. My principal object is to go diamond-digging on the Vaal River.

1. Is there any occupation except mining in which there is a fair chance to make a good profit?

2. Does it require much experience for diamond-mining? I will add that I've had no experience in that line."—H. B. Fell, Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

"N. B.—I beg to inclose a clipping from a Glasgow (Scotland) paper which has interested me in diamond-digging."

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—1. Too vague to answer properly. Naturally there are dozens: farming, transport, trading, running hotels, running a taxi, etc., from bell-hop to gambling on the diamond exchange.

2. Diamond-digging certainly does require experience. If you have none you wouldn't know a diamond raw from a stone on the beach.

If you'll let me hand it out straight, don't take any notice of fool articles you read in newspapers such as you inclosed. Many a prospector for diamonds or gold spends a lifetime, and a —— hard one, and gets nothing for it. The diamond kings you read about didn't make their money by digging for diamonds; they made it out of the boob who sweated his heart out locating the placer and buying it for nothing—that's mostly the case.

Sorry to be kind of rough about it, but you don't want soft soap, I guess.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask *Adventure* editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

How Snakes Eat Deer Whole

ANTLERS go down the "red lane" with the rest of the animal, and if they stick through Mr. Snake, much he cares:

Question:—"A statement was made in my presence that the larger serpents—boa, anaconda, python, probably—will swallow an entire deer; that when a buck is swallowed the horns sometimes protrude through the snake's skin, with no bad effect on the snake.

I seem to recall from a rather aimless reading that the ingestion of an entire deer or antelope is ascribed to these serpents, but somehow or other I can not swallow the antlers part of the story even if Friend Snake is credited with so doing.

You are selected out of Ask *Adventure* to answer this question because your territory has 'em, as I remember."—Leo P. Cook, Marinette, Wis.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—I don't want to pose as a springer of snake yarns, but the dope you have stated is about correct. The way the snakes swallow such big things is done by stretching of the ligaments of the jaws. They keep slobbering and swallowing, and the leaders stretch to any length to enable the mouth to surround the object.

Such things as ox-heads with the horns on have been swallowed, and deer—hide, horns and all complete—have been swallowed. I have a photo down home of a small snake swallowing a larger one. The stomach juices of the snake are very powerful, and the body of the larger snake was digested gradually as it was swallowed, the process taking several days.

Horns and such sharp objects project through the stomach and skin of a snake when they are sharp enough to penetrate. They are digested on

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the inside, and the outside ends fall off and the holes heal up nicely with no ill effects.

The largest snake-farm in the world is located at São Paulo, Brazil. They have all sorts and have made extensive studies of their customs and habits.

If you could get in touch with the Brazilian government and get some of the books published by them on snakes they would give you some new and interesting data.

Best Weapon for Home Defense

MR. WIGGINS recommends a burglar-chaser that looks like a winner. No aiming; just point and let 'er rip:

Question:—"Have you a .32-caliber revolver for sale cheap? I prefer a long barrel. Don't care whether it is rim or center fire, single or double action, but will not pay over $5 for same."—EDWARD C. ORR, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I do not sell firearms; merely give information in regard to them.

You will not be able to secure a new revolver of any kind at the present time for $5, but you might be able to pick up one in some second-hand store or pawnshop for that price. You will be apt to need a permit from the police department to be allowed to purchase one at all, as I think the Illinois law is strict on that point.

If you want a gun for home protection, why not try the following plan:

Get a single-barrel shotgun and file or cut off the barrel to a length of eighteen inches. This is far more certain than a revolver in the hands of the average man, and you need no permit, so far as I know, to purchase one. Use BB shot and a good load of powder in any shell you can buy, and it's got everything in the revolver or pistol line beaten a mile as a burglar-chaser.

Cattle-Raising in Bolivia

HERE'S one of the best stock-countries in the world, says Mr. Young:

Question:—"I would like to go to Bolivia and go into the stock business, and if advisable try prospecting.

I am an American; punched cows until 1916, then joined the Canadian Army; served three years at the front; am 32 years old and single; in good health.

Here are some questions I would be very pleased to have you answer:

a. Is the climate healthy for whites in the southern half and southeastern quarter in particular?

b. Is it a good stock (horses and cattle) country from every angle of the game?

c. Where are the placer diggings, and is there a fair chance to make any money at that?

d. About what are saddle and pack horses worth?

e. What do grass steers average on the market there?

f. Are there many wild cattle there, and how do they compare with the Texas longhorn?

g. How do provisions compare with prices here?

h. Is there any duty on saddles, pack-saddles, firearms and other equipment? If so, what rate?

i. Are the natives hostile to white settlers or not?

j. Is it advisable to go alone or even two?

k. Which locality, in your opinion, is the best for stock-raising (health, climate, water, markets, building-material and fuel considered)?

l. Is there grazing the year around, or is it necessary to put up hay?

m. Do you think the average Western American would be satisfied to live there?

n. Is there plenty of game and fish, and what kinds?"—JACK FORD, Mound House, Nev.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—*a*. Yes.

b. Yes. The district you mention is one of the finest stock countries in the world.

c. On the eastern slopes of the Andes in northern and central portions.

d. Depends on locality. Horseflesh is very high since the war. Am unable to state exact prices. Llamas are not bad to pack with, each animal packing a hundred pounds at a good pace and picking a living along the road but requiring a rest after two weeks on the trail.

e. Depends on nearness to market. Export steers run to a good price.

f. Quite a number of wild herds in the eastern part yet. They compare favorably with the Texas longhorn but are an evolution of the Spanish cattle from which they derived. Down in the southeastern corner is a trace of zebu through the native cattle, caused by local customs of breeding a strain of zebu into the native cattle to make them more hardy against tick and other fevers.

g. Cost of living high since the European war. The farther you get away from civilization the less it costs.

h. No, not if for your own use.

i. Natives are not hostile, except in very retired spots where savages are to be found. The native people and tame tribes of Indians are friendly.

j. Pretty lonely trip for one man. Two men are O. K. for the trip.

k. Southeastern portion in the Chaco country.

l. Grazing the year around.

m. Yes.

n. See Encyclopedia Britannica under name of Bolivia and subhead *Fauna* for list of game.

A Road of Salt

IT IS fourteen feet thick, rests on a lake of brine, and runs past a ranch that maintains shower-baths for its livestock. Is this a lie? Not at all. Ask 'most any Californian:

Question:—"Please send me information about minerals and prospecting in Death Valley. I am a miner and prospector, and wish to camp and prospect for mineral in Death Valley."—JAMES J. DONAGHEY, Roosevelt, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Death Valley lies three hundred and fifty feet below sea-level, and the floor of the valley is almost all filled with salt, soda, borax and kindred stuff. Across the southern part runs a road that is all on salt, a crust fourteen feet thick that rests on a lake of brine. Men broke the pinnacles and ridges down with sledge-hammers to make the road.

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There is one ranch in the valley, and it belongs to a mining outfit that has a mine up in the hills. At this ranch they maintain shower-baths that play on the cattle and horses. The chickens go into the water-ditches to cool off. They put up sheet-iron along the corral fences to keep the hot winds off the stock.

The Summer heat hovers around 140 all the time. Nights are almost as hot as the days. It is a literal hell, in which few men can live more than three years at a stretch.

There are very few water-holes in the valley that hold water fit to drink. Camping there is a crazy man's trick, and no man who knows the valley will do it in Summer.

It is cold in Winter there. I know a man who prospected the valley from end to end in Winter, using a high-powered automobile. He spent an entire Winter at it, but he came out once in two weeks, saying two weeks in hell was all he could stand at a time. The lack of good water was the main evil in Winter. He found nothing worth while.

There are gold and silver deposits there, but the principal minerals are the chemicals named—soda, borax, salt, etc. Their presence prevents vegetation. It is a blamed good country to stay out of, in my opinion.

I think that fully sixty per cent. of the prospectors who have gone into Death Valley have died there. The mineral there does not warrant such risks. If you persist in your idea of going there to camp and prospect, you will do it against my advice.

The Physician in China

IN PAYING the doctor the Chinese adopt a practise just opposite from ours. Like so many others of their customs, this one seems hind-side-to from the Occidental viewpoint; but even so they can give us an argument, in this instance at least:

Question:—"My wife and I, both physicians and surgeons, having suffered financial reverses, are desirous of going to China and starting anew. Will you be kind enough (and patient) to answer the following questions:

1. What in general are the opportunities for two physicians with a knowledge of the French, Italian and German languages?

2. Are there many white people living in the larger cities of China?

3. Is there much opportunity for practising among the Chinese people without a knowledge of their language or customs?

4. What is the financial aspect considering that we settle in a large city and practise medicine and surgery?

5. How is the climate in the larger Chinese cities?

6. Do you know of any American missions in China that employ physicians and surgeons?

Should this letter be published in *Adventure* please use my initials only."—K. R.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—Generally speaking, the medical profession in China is usually controlled by firms of doctors in partnership. I would suggest that you communicate with the doctors in Hongkong or Shanghai as to terms on which partnership could be secured.

Following are the cities with the largest European and American population in the Far East: Bangkok, Siam, 2,000; Canton, Kwangtung, 800; Chefoo, Shantung, 313; Kantow, Hupeh, 1607; Harbin, Manchuria, 55,775 (including Russians); Hongkong, 7,750; Manila, Philippine Islands, 5,912; Saigon, French Indo-China, 3,500; Shanghai, 13,596; Tsingtau, Shantung, 474; Vladivostok 85,000 (including Russians). This answers your queries one and two.

3. As a rule the Chinese do not consult European or American physicians. You perhaps are not aware of the old custom in China in the matter of medical attention. Most families retain a doctor by the year, paying him a stipulated fee to keep them in good health. Should any of the family become sick, the pay of the physician ceases until they are well again.

This probably would seem a very sensible arrangement, but I am afraid it would work a considerable hardship on some of our physicians. In the old days of the monarchy if the sickness lasted for any length of time the doctor was severely punished and sometimes lost his life.

4. Provided you can get connected with one of the firms of doctors already enjoying a practise I should say that the opportunities of making a financial success are very good, and in the course of time you could branch out alone after having become acclimated and established a reputation.

5. Climatic conditions in China vary considerably, according to the altitude. At Tientsin or Peking, which are in the same latitude as San Francisco and Washington, the thermometer falls to 4 degrees F. and rises in Summer to 100 degrees F.

At Shanghai, which lies in a latitude between that of San Diego and New Orleans, the Winter temperature reaches 15 degrees F. and the Summer temperature 98 degrees F. At Canton, which lies in the same latitude as Havana, the temperature rarely falls in the Winter below 32 degrees F. and rises in the Summer to a maximum of about 98 degrees F.

Generally speaking considerable rain falls in China during the Spring and Summer months. The Winters are cold and dry in the north, often with no rainfall between the months of November and April. The Winters of the central or Yangtze River region are cold and damp, while those of the south are comparatively dry and mild. The annual rainfall in the north averages 25 inches, in the Yangtze region 44 inches, and in Kwangtung in the south 70 inches.

6. I understand that the American missions employ physicians and surgeons, and would refer you to the Methodist Episcopal Church, Foreign Missions, Fifth Avenue, New York, for information.

If there is any other information I can give you will be glad to hear from you again.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask *Adventure* editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

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The Disappearing Malamute

EVEN in the far north spaces the nimble flivver is running out its animal rivals in the transportation field:

Question:—"Will you please inform me when, where and at what price I can purchase a real genuine malamute? I prefer a puppy, so can raise it up with the children and have it for a watch-dog."—MRS. H. ANDERSON, Whittier, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—I do not know where you could get a malamute in this degenerate age when gasoline has displaced the husky and people are flying from New York to Nome. I got in touch with a couple of breeders who used to raise dogs for trails a few years ago but without success. There was no longer a demand, hence a dwindling of the supply.

Why not try a want ad. in a Frisco or a Los Angeles paper? Surely some of the kennel owners can tell you where to get one. Failing in this, why not try an Airedale or a collie? Personally I would prefer either of these breeds to a malamute, since I believe they are equally faithful and intelligent without the drawback of an almighty uncertain temper.

How to "Taw" a Pelt

HANDY to know when it's impracticable to preserve the skin by tanning:

Question:—"I keep some nice rabbits and kill quite a few. Now I must throw all the hides away because I don't know any way to cure or tan them. Would you be kind enough to send me some formula, or directions, so I can use them around the house for ornaments or rugs? Nobody around here cares to bother to tan two or three hides; they want them by the hundreds; so I would like to find out some old-fashioned way for myself."—KARL ASCHENBRAND, Bayonne, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—You can preserve rabbitskins for most purposes by taking ½ pound of powdered alum, same of salt, and 2 ounces of saltpeter, mixing them in about a gallon of water. When all dissolved, put the skins into the mixture, cover it over (use an earthen jar, tub or anything) and after a week or two, when you have time, wash the skins in clear fresh water, wring them out (they are mighty tender, you know) and dry them. Either dry or green skins can be put into the mixture.

To dry them soft, you'll have to wring and work them in your hands for quite a while. I've done this for deerskins, squirrelskins, etc. My brother handled some northern hareskins this way, too. If the skins stiffen up too much because you can't twist them enough, just work a little vaseline or castor oil into the backs (hides) and that will soften them. If you want to poison them, rub in some arsenical soap (at any drug-store).

This will preserve the rabbitskins as good as anything. It is called a "taw," as a preservative using tannin is called a "tan." I think you will find it satisfactory. "Home Manufacture of Furs," published by A. R. Harding, Walnut St., St. Louis, Mo., gives many useful hints in tanning, tawing and working pelts into useful and ornamental rugs, wall-pieces, etc. You might find it worth getting.

Yawl or Ketch *vs.* Sloop Rig

PROBABLY closer sailing can be done by the sloop; but that type of vessel requires a bigger crew for the same sail-area:

Question:—"I have done a little sailing, and would like to get myself a small boat when I have the time to take a trip around the bay. I should prefer one about thirty-six or forty feet long that myself and a friend or two could handle.

How much should a ketch or yawl-rigged boat with an auxiliary motor in it cost? What is the advantage of a boat of this rig over a sloop rig? Is there any reliable firm that you know of in Baltimore or round about that I could get into communication with, or any place that it would be possible for me to hire such a boat for a couple of months?"—LOUIS M. CHILDS, Annapolis, Md.

Answer, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—If you will put a want ad. in some Baltimore newspaper or in some yachting magazine such as *Rudder*, published in New York, describing exactly the type of boat you want, the chances are that you will get plenty of replies. Prices vary so enormously that it is hard to give you figures. I have known of a comfortable yawl with a "kicker" sell for $350, which was but a small fraction of her cost.

The advantage of the yawl or the ketch over the sloop for convenience in handling is that with both of them the amount of canvas, which in the sloop is all in the mainsail, is in the other distributed over two different sails, giving that much advantage in making or reducing sail. Either one can be put under storm rig in half the time that it would take to close-reef a sloop's mainsail, and one man can handle a yawl more handily than, or as handily as, two could handle a sloop of similar size and sail-area.

Fur and Big Game on the Coast

FORTY-EIGHT mountain lion, bagged by one man during one season in one county! Who says the big game in the U. S. is all shot off?

Question:—"Please advise me where is the best hunting-ground for bear, mountain lions and tigers. Also what furs can be caught in Oregon and Utah."—HARLEY BENSON, Rising City, Nebr.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—As good a place for bear as I know is in the cut-over land of Humboldt County, Calif.

For mountain lions—there were forty-eight killed by one man in Santa Barbara County last Winter, with a pack of dogs to tree them.

Tigers? Where did you get the idea that we had tigers in the West? Did you read about the Mexicans calling a certain cat *El Tigre*? They have him down there—a cat about the size of a mountain lion, but differently colored and marked.

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There are no tigers in my territory, save a few "blind tigers" which the police are looking for every day.

Fur animals of the coast are: bear, wolf, coyote, badger, skunk, mink, fisher, marten, weasel, wolverine, lynx, bobcat, cougar or mountain lion, fox, coon, ringtail cat, civet, muskrat in some marshy places.

Not quite all of these are to be found in Utah, however.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

LENZ, CHARLY. Last heard of in Argentine Republic in 1914, at Carbinteus, Calle Tuinman, 344 Catamarin. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ERNEST LENZ, 1111 39th St., Galveston, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

EVANS, WELCOME LAFAYETTE. Grandfather. Age between sixty-five and seventy-five. Any one knowing his whereabouts or his relatives in Texas please write.—Address F. L. HARPER, Hodge, La.

ASKINS, IRA V. Born in Illinois. Last heard of in Kansas. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate with JOHN A. BEATY, 532 E. 42nd Place, Chicago, Ill.

MORRIS, WILLIAM E. Thirty-three years old, brown hair and eyes, five feet, six inches tall, weighs about 120 pounds; lame in right leg, effects of gun-shot wound in right thigh. Left home in Plainfield, N. J., about three years ago. Have not heard from him since. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. W. H. MORRIS, 959 North Ave. W., Westfield, N. J.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

NODEN, WILLIAM M. Last heard from in Nome, Alaska. Was leaving there. Not heard from for twenty-three or twenty-four years. Height, five feet, three inches, rather stout, brown hair, blue eyes. About forty-eight years old. May be in Calgary, Canada. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—MRS. MARY NODEN, N. Orange and Highland Aves., Media, Pa.

MCLAURE, E. J. Last heard from in Puerto Cortez, Spanish Honduras, in 1917. His old friend would like to hear from him.—Address ROBERT MCCREADIE, 528 Adams St., Gary, Ind.

ERICKSON, CARL J. Last heard from in Conrad, Mont. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MARGARET ERICKSON, Box 491, Anaconda, Mont.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MEAGHER, THOMAS F. Husband. Age twenty-six and three months. Five feet, eight inches tall, weight 130 pounds. Dark brown hair, fair complexion and hazel eyes, large white regular teeth, prominent cheek-bones. Has pock-mark in center of forehead, scar on left side of head. Last heard from in Hillsboro Hotel, Tampa, Fla. Any information as to his whereabouts please communicate to his wife.—Address MRS. ALICE T. MEAGHER, 18 Mt. Hope Place, New York, N. Y.

KINDLING, LOUIS. Don't you remember D. C. L. C. days at New Ulm, Minn.? Write to your old friend.—Address HERBERT SCHALLER, R 4, Renville, Minn.

DORPEMA, JACK. Light complexion, brown hair and eyes. Last heard of in Lancaster, California, about six years ago. Write to your old pal. B. M.—Address B. MOORE, New Home Hotel, South Bend, Wisc.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

MAGNUS, ALF. (EGGEN). Left Bessemer, Mich., 1909. Last heard from in Galveston, Texas, December, 1914. Twenty-seven years old last April. Height about five feet, ten inches; brown hair, hazel eyes, ruddy complexion. Is a good singer. His sister died two years ago. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. GUNHILD MAGNUS, 985 Pearl St., Eugene, Oregon.

RICHARDS, JACK C. Telegrapher. Last heard of in San Francisco about six months ago. Was going to Honolulu with the Marconi Wireless. Worked for S. P. near Stockton, Cal., during the Winter of 1919-1920. Was also in Marine Hospital in San Francisco in February, 1920. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please notify.—CHAS. D. DAVIS, care of Rock Island Relay Office, Herington, Kansas.

FARRELL, BARTHOLOMEW. Curly hair, age forty, weight 140 pounds. Last heard from in Laize Bridge, Alberta Canada, where he was injured in explosion. Any information regarding his whereabouts will be appreciated by his brother.—Address JAMES C. GRAHAM, 9 Ave. 7, Ville St. Pierre, Auxbins, Montreal, Canada.

WORNER, HENRY. Let me hear from you. Address O. W., care of *Adventure.*

WILSON, ROBERT E. Please communicate with your old friend, R. M. TOMLINSON, Douglas Co., Olalla, Ore.

SANDBERG, WILLIAM. Swedish. Light hair, blue eyes, about twenty-five years of age. Last heard from in 22nd Balloon Co., Camp Eustis, Va., in April, 1919. His home is in California. Have valuable information for him. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—M. E. MILLER, Rio Vista, Cal.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

CLARK, JOE. Last heard of in Port Arthur, Texas. Please write to your old pal who sailed with you on the tugboat *S. B.* on the gulf.—Address JACK MYERS, care of Eddie Hoffman, 1301 Ave. F, Galveston, Texas.

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GUNTER, JAMES. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—JAMES PRICE, 1259 E. 6th St., Los Angeles, Cal.

FRIENDS and relatives of Fred. J. Noonan, son of Joseph Noonan of Chicago. Only known relatives were an uncle, aunt, cousin and grandfather who were living in the vicinity of Wilson and California Aves., North Side, Chicago, in 1907. Any information will be appreciated. Write.—FRED J. NOONAN, Galveston, Texas.

BONIE, LUIS TEREA. Brother. Left Guatemala, C. A., with his father, George Bonie, twenty-three years ago. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. J. C. THURSTON, White Cottage, Ohio.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Mid-February or First March issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirer from this magazine.

BENTLEY, MILTON REYNOLDS; Berner, Cart; Blanchard, Fred Joseph; Brett, Patrick; Carlew, George Stephenson; Clark, Joe; Cullinan, Michael; Flynn, Peter Paul; Fowle, Dr. Fairfax T.; Gaugh, Charles; Gibson, Capt. Percy B.; Gordon, J. C.; Harold, J. S.; Heigelmann, Edward H.; Hickey, Frank; Ingels, Dr. Anson B.; Maynard, Cecil D.; McCafferty, Frank; McCauley, George W.; McCawley, Walter F.; McFarland, Harry; McKnight, Robert; McWilliams, Walter; Mullins, Roy; Myers, William X.; O'Connor, Jeremiah; Page, W. A.; Pechin, Miss Camille; Racine, Jon; Riddell, Edward (alias Eddie Sweeney); Rodigan, Tobias; Smith, Charley; Smith, William J.; Solah, Joe; Starr, Ted; Steen, William F.; Study; Swenson, N. A.; Taylor, Charles W. Sr.; Thomas, R. S.; Van Zile, Ralph; Walsh, Michael and Mathew; West, J. P.; White, Emory; Will, Collis; Wilson, G. Harry.

MISCELLANEOUS. C. L. W. (husband); De Cisare, Florence; Annunciata, Mrs. Rosie; Leonard, Mrs. Louise; Van Camp, Mrs. Gertrude; Tours, 2nd A. I. C., France, Members of Photo Section and Members of 5th Casuals at St. Louis de Montferrand.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Miss Jimmie Banks; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; T. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie; James Mosse; R. W. Kimsey; C. H. Huntington; D. Polowe.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Allen, Paul; Beaton, G. M.; Mr. and Mrs. Bennett; Benson, E. N.; Bertsch, Miss Elizabeth; Blighton, Frank; Bonner, J. S.; Brownell, Mr.; Buckley, Ray; Campbell, Maurice Viele; Carpenter, Robert S.; Carr, John; Chisholm, D. F. K.; Clark, Ernest S.; Cleve, Jim; Clingham, Charles; Coles, Bobby; Connor, A. M.; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Corbett, Fred P.; Crosby, Arthur F.; Curtis, D. A.; Courtlandt, Victor; Fisher, 1st Sgt. R.; Harris, Walter J.; Hoffman, J. M.; Howard, Charlie; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Kuckaby, William Francis; Klug, Chas. C.; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lanahan, Robert; Lancaster, C. E.; Lander, Harry; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Capt. Harry; Lee, Wm. R., M. D.; Lonely Jock; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; MacKaye, D. C.; Mackintoch, D. T. A.; Mendelson, Aleck; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nylander, Towne Jr.; O'Hara, Jack; Olmstead, Harry E.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Raines, Wm. L.; Raphaelson, Sampson; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rundle, Merrill G.; St. Clair, Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F.; Sloan, George L.; Smith, C. O.; Starr, Ted.; Soloway, Jack M.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wiley, Floyd; Williams, Capt. W. P.; J. C. H.; W. W. T.; S. 177284; L. T. 4439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST APRIL ISSUE

In addition to the two novelettes mentioned on the second contents page, the following stories come to you in the next issue:

THE TURN OF THE TIDE — *Chester L. Saxby*
Arnie sets a new course.

GUNS OF THE GODS Part III — *Talbot Mundy*
Yasmini's coils are closing in on *Gungadhura*.

THE PATH OF A KING — *John Buchan*

VII Eaucourt by the Waters
When the Huguenots were slaughtered in Paris streets.

VIII The Hidden City
The tale of treasure that Sir Walter Raleigh heard.

IN SELF-DEFENSE — *Captain Dingle*
A fight on board ship and a Chinese cook who says nothing—until the right time comes.

THE FRAME-UP — *Gordon Young*
There are more ways of catching a murderer than by setting a steel trap.

AMNESIA — *L. Patrick Greene*
It is death by torture unless the *Major* can remember.

THE GANTLET-RUNNERS — *Samuel Alexander White*
Northwest trappers try to force the river-barrier.

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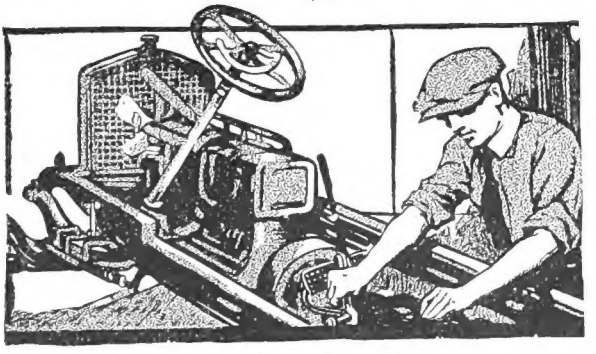

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- Final Drive
- Steering
- Frames
- Tires
- Vulcanizing
- Ignition
- Starting & Lighting Systems
- Wiring Diagrams
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Deltor—

a New Butterick Invention

DELTOR is not only a way to make home dressmaking easy: DELTOR is a marvelous new way of making your own home dressmaking look like the work of a Paris or Fifth Avenue shop!

"IMPOSSIBLE!" perhaps you say. "The knack of imparting that individuality, that character, that charm, which makes the New York or Paris creation look as though it were the only one of its kind in all the world—that is a gift. How could I, a mere amateur, ever hope to acquire it?"

But, you see, with DELTOR you don't need to acquire the gift. With the DELTOR you merely appropriate the *results* of it.

How Deltor is Made

When you open your Butterick Pattern to begin work, right there the DELTOR appears, to show you—not, mind you, merely the proper way in general to lay the pattern out upon the goods, but exactly how the expert cutter would lay out your particular size of that particular pattern, on the very width and kind of goods you have bought for it, if you had gone to the Paris or Fifth Avenue salon where that style originated, to have it made individually for you!

The economy alone of this is a great deal. If using a Butterick Pattern with its DELTOR saved only a fraction of a yard, and the materials were of the cheapest, the saving in these days would be worth while. But in expensive materials DELTOR may easily make you a clear saving of *two, three or even four dollars!*

Putting Together Made Easy

When it comes to putting the garment together, DELTOR is almost like having the master tailor of the Paris or New York shop appear at your side to direct you. For exactly what he would do with those very pieces you now have before you, if he were making it to your order, is shown, step by step, by the DELTOR. You do not experiment, you do not worry, you simply do first what the first picture shows you how to do; then you do the next thing, then the next, and so on, and no matter if you never made up a garment before in your life, you will at every step be doing just what the master-tailor would be doing.

All that is necessary is for you to follow each picture in order.

The Piquancy of French Sewing

If, in making a garment, you would not think of the best method of finishing, when the general effect would be enhanced by embroidery, beading or braiding; if you have innocently bound a seam with seam-binding because you were doing the others that way, when a French genius would see that just in that one place the style effect would be carried out better by overcasting; if, in short, you haven't the inborn genius of the French artist for visualizing effects and inventing surprising ways to get them, then, no matter how correct the style of your pattern, nor how patiently you have cut and sewed it, your finished work will lack the charm its original had.

DELTOR shows you when to picot, when to gather, when to tuck, when to press, when to drape, what kind of seam to use here and what kind there, and so on and on until your own fingers reproduce in your own garment the very genius of the great shop.

DELTOR, as would be expected, is a Butterick invention and exclusively a feature of Butterick Patterns. It is patented in all countries and can be used only with Butterick Patterns.

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